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Flames of Sin

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Historical novel of Florida in the early 19th century. The hero, an orphan of unknown parentage, called Artillery Armes is reared by a renegade American but spends much of his youth with the Indians. He later becomes involved in Florida's rebellion against the Spaniards and the annexation of Florida by the U.S.

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THE FLAMES OF TIME

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By

BAYNARD KENDRICK



NEW YORK
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1948

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A

To

THE BANK OF ROMNEY (69–192)
Romney, West Virginia

without whose help this book
(and my others) would never
have been written.

FOREWORD

NO attempt has been made in THE FLAMES OF TIME to give a complete list of the sources consulted over a period of five years, but a complete bibliography is on file with the publishers. Particular credit must be given to Edward W. Lawson and the late Katherine S. Lawson of the Historical Library at St. Augustine for unfailing help in translations made of old Spanish documents; to my wife, Martha; my secretary, Edward Reisine; the Artists' Reference Bureau, and Robert Abels, all of whom solved many knotty problems that were unforeseen. The most difficult of these was the genealogy of John Houston McIntosh and his family. The President of the East Florida Republic has been consistently confused with his cousin, Colonel John McIntosh, who was imprisoned by the Spanish in 1794. Eleven historical sources consulted give his history incorrectly. Thanks for clarification must be given to Joseph Gaston Baillie Bulloch, who gives the McIntosh family tree in his *Memoirs of the Baillie of Dunain.*

THE FLAMES OF TIME

BOOK ONE

1787

★

THE BABY

★



THE man plodding along beside the oxcart kept his eyes fixed on the top of a live oak tree which showed against the sky above the pines. The live oak might mark the beginning of a bayhead, and a bayhead meant that water was near. The man was very tall, and his shoulders hunched forward wearily under his heavy tattered shirt as he shuffled along.

There were times when there were disadvantages to being tall. His height made walking difficult, for he had to cut down his normal stride to accommodate his speed to the progress of the oxen. After three months of plodding along behind them he had learned that using the goad was merely a waste of effort.

There had been six oxen when he and his wife left Carolina in October—three healthy, newly purchased span. Hitched in tandem, they had moved slowly but untiringly, sometimes covering as much as thirty miles in a day. Now there were only four. Two had sickened and died in Georgia, and the four that remained had thinned, and looked poorly.

With six, the wagon had not seemed overloaded. Now the furniture in it and the farming tools and the bedding roped above a highboy with a rocking chair lashed on top loomed very high. The wagon and its load had become a living thing, a determined, unmovable object, everlastingly pitting its weight against the oxen's strain. The man shifted the two heavy pistols stuck in his waistband and shivered a little. He had hoped to find heat in Florida, warmth and sunshine, gentle breezes that might restore the color to his wife's pale cheeks before the baby was born. The hope had become a jest. Bitter cold had tracked him implacably through Georgia and crossed the St. Mary's River with him that morning.

It was still at his heels. It would settle down with deathly frostiness as soon as the sun was gone, numbing him and the tired oxen and his uncomplaining wife, lying so still in the back of the wagon.

Somehow on the long trek south he had lost all trace of time. Not until the Spanish sentry at the St. Mary's River had marked his papers that morning had he realized that it was the twenty-fourth of December, 1787! Ten long years since a ball from one of the American rebels had smashed his shoulder. Today, not only the colonies had been lost to England, but even Florida was gone—ceded back to the Spanish by some bovine British statesman four years before.

He had dreamed of settling in Florida, owning a plantation there as his uncle had before him. But the dream was dead. His uncle had left as had all the English, abandoning homes and hopes, leaving a populous, prosperous colony to be overrun by encroaching jungle. There seemed to be a blight that followed everything touched and acquired by failing, decadent Spain, though it was Spain that brought him there with its offer of a thousand acres to be paid for with a nominal sum out of tobacco crops. He supposed she had to do something, make some concessions to populate the deserted territory once again.

In the wagon, he heard his wife moan. He halted the oxen and walked to the back, lowering the heavy tailboard. She lay in a nook, the piled-up furniture towering above her, a flower-like girl in her early twenties, scarcely heavy enough to depress the thick feather mattress beneath her. At the sight of him she smiled, but her lips were colorless and pinched, and her blue eyes bright with fever.

"Tired, little lady?"

She shook her head. "It's the baby, Major. Are we near any village?"

"There must be something soon." He placed a hand on her forehead, felt the heat and smoothed back her golden hair. It was damp beneath his fingers. Farther up in the wagon was a tightly-wedged-in bucket. He took out a dipperful of water, scowling at the remaining scanty contents, then raised her with an arm beneath her shoulders and let her drink.

She took but a swallow. He found a clean handkerchief, moistened it from the dipper, and gently bathed her forehead and temples. The balance of water he poured back into the bucket.

She moaned again. For an instant he stood staring down at her swollen belly, rounding the folds of his own long cloak which covered her. His lean face was tight with despair. He slipped a hand beneath

the coverings and felt her muscles contract at the touch of his palm.

"Is he kicking again?" He forced a smile.

"He's coming, Major."

"He'd better wait until tomorrow, lady. It's Christmas."

"I don't think he'll wait for Christmas. Wherever we're going, we'd better hurry, or we'll have a child before we get there."

"We'll make it, Mother, don't worry." He kissed her lightly.

"It's the first time you ever called me 'Mother.'" She touched his cheek.

"You'll hear it often if you like it."

"I love it."

He straightened and closed the tailboard, then swept back his overlong hair. The oxen plodded on at his sharp command. The rear left wheel squeaked again as it had throughout their journey.

The sun looked bronze through a haze, and was already half-hidden by the towering tops of the moss-hung trees. The temperature was dropping fast.

With a sharp "Gee!" he turned the oxen through a space between two pines, and cursed himself for leaving the old King's Road, which led from the St. Mary's River straight south to Cowford. The King's Road hadn't been much, Heaven knows, but it was the only travelable highway from the northern states to the province of Florida and there was every chance that he might have found help there.

Still, he had to have water. Desperately, now with his wife in labor.

The trees thinned out imperceptibly. There were neither rut marks nor hoof marks underfoot, but his woodsman's eye told him he was following some sort of a trail. The top of the live oak which had served as his guide had disappeared, masked by the thickness of overhead branches.

The tired oxen lumbered into a circular clearing, and once more he saw the tree. It was mammoth as he had judged from a distant view, with a trunk so huge that two tall men could scarcely have circled it with extended arms. The ground where it stood was sandy and dry, spotted with palmettoes. There was no visible sign that anything living had ever set foot in the clearing before, yet the man knew on sight that the live oak centered a spot where years before some settler had made a home.

On the west side of the clearing the pine trees vanished, cut down cleanly by some great natural scythe. The blackness of swampland was smeared in a band along the horizon, impenetrably dark,

its upper edge fringed with touches of green and bands of mossy gray.

He selected a spot where the pine trees grew thickest, and stopped the wagon. The trees formed a natural stockade and would serve as shade should the next day be sunny, or partial shelter should the variable weather of the Southland change from cold to rain.

He lowered the tailboard, saw that his wife was sleeping, then unyoked the oxen and staked them out on lines of rope amongst the pine trees to forage. The grass was pitifully meager, but he was very short of grain. That done, he looked to his pistols, checking the charge and priming, and stuck them back in his waistband, changing their position slightly from the spots where days of walking had caused his skin to gall. He took two balled muskets from the wagon and inspected them with similar care.

The Spanish soldiers at St. Mary's had warned him that the thick woods bordering the old King's Road were peopled with bandits and with renegade Indian marauders, broken away from the friendly Creek nation. Also, many black slaves fleeing the lash of the Georgia planters crossed into Florida to find sanctuary among the Seminoles. In addition, gangs recruited from the scum of Georgia made constant forays into Florida to steal the Seminoles' herds of cattle. Bandits, Indians, desperate slaves, and cattle thieves all considered the loaded wagons of travelers legitimate game.

He restored the muskets to their place in the wagon, took out two buckets and an axe, and crossed the clearing to the swamp edge. He knew that the swampland bordered a creek or no settler would have ever made the clearing. The swamp was a wall of spindly cypress, thatched with tangled vines. At first sight it seemed impassable. Selecting the sparsest growth, he pushed his way through for twenty feet. There he was stopped.

He set the buckets down, seized the axe, and began to hack his way through. It was dark in the swamp, and the day was nearly gone. Swarms of mosquitoes resented his invasion with strident ferocity. He had become so inured to such minor discomforts that he scarcely paused to brush them away. With the axe upraised, he froze at the soft flap of heavy wings above him. Standing unmoving, he watched a flock of wild turkeys circle in to settle effortlessly on the branches of a nearby cypress tree.

It was the culmination of a trip of misfortune where everything had been timed just wrong. Short on rations, and with a succulent dinner in view, he had no gun, and knew the futility of

the short-range pistols. Nevertheless, he remained quite still. The turkeys, if not frightened, would guide him to the nearby stream. Their preliminary landing on the tall, dead cypress was merely a ruse, a chance for the thirty-pound gobbler leading the flock to take a look around.

The man cut down on his breathing and stayed immobile as the nearby tree. The gobbler's long neck snaked out while the beady eyes made a cautious survey. Satisfied, the gobbler spread his wings and with a preliminary flap which stirred the air, took off majestically. The hens followed. They bore to the right, circled once, and settled down in another tree, taller than the first.

The man relaxed and changed his course, knowing that the birds always picked a roosting place above a running stream where their traceable droppings were safely washed away. His axe crashed into a resistant vine and instantly the turkeys took alarm and were gone to some safer place for sleeping.

Plowing through the deep, sticky mud, slashing the foliage vigorously to beat the darkness, he finally reached the stream, filled his buckets, and quickly retraced his trail. He got out just in time, for already with dusk the contours of the swamp had changed. Fifteen minutes longer, and he might have been trapped in its sticky embrace until day.

His wife was awake again. Undaunted by the cold, the mosquitoes had swarmed out of grass and swamp with the passing of daylight. He found a piece of netting in the wagon and covered her face and shoulders.

"Where were you, Major?" she asked him.

"I went to get water. We're camped not far from a stream."

"You took a long time. I called, and you didn't answer."

"I had to chop my way through part of a swamp," he explained.

"You took a long time, Major. I thought you'd gone."

He laughed, and raised her shoulders, propping her up a little. "I'm going to fix supper."

"I don't want anything."

"None of my sumptuous stew of pork and corn meal? We even have a few greens left."

"I'm afraid I can't."

"Some tea?"

"I'll try."

"Good lady." He smoothed her hair again and rearranged the netting.

The terror of birth was on them both. It couldn't even be

mentioned. He'd brought her into this wilderness and she'd followed him, loving and uncomplaining. The hours ahead looked as dark as the swampland. He went off into the pine trees, found one fallen, rich with sap, and dragged it out close to the wagon, where he hewed it into logs. The logs in place, and chips beneath, he knelt down in the darkness and offered up a prayer.

"Merciful God, when Thy infinite wisdom has brought us thus far on our journey, guide us safely through this night of darkness until we see again the light of Thy merciful dawn."

The fat chips took hold and touched the logs. Sap crackled, popped and sputtered. Suddenly, the flames shot high, shadows flickered black against the pine trees, and he was in a circular cathedral with all the darkness gone.

He raised a tripod, hung a small, black cauldron on it, and put in some corn meal, pork, and water to make his stew. Another pot he set beside the fire so that water for the tea might boil.

The heat repelled the coldness and the mosquitoes. Squatting down beside the flames, for a time the man could believe that he had reached the end of the journey. The old mahogany of the furniture on the wagon glowed with a kind, domestic sheen. The woods around him seemed friendly, like the fence of some quiet farm. The wagon was a citadel, small and secure, and his own. The girl on the bed inside it was young again and healthy and happy, and safe from any harm.

The stew began to simmer. He rose and went to look at the oxen. They'd need water, but this was a night when he'd need it worse. At dawn the beasts could slosh through the mire to the creekside and drink their fill. Mud was their element anyhow. They'd be fresher when he and his wife and the baby moved on.

He stopped in the darkness of the pine trees. Behind him the clearing showed bright, giving him the sensation of standing outside a window and looking into a lighted room. His hands dropped down to close about the coolness of his pistols and he stood frozen as he had with the upraised axe while watching the incoming turkeys. The sandy ground was pock-marked with the oxen's hoofprints.

He moved a few steps forward, bent over as if in a dream, and touched a piece of rope circling one of the pine trees. From there he moved on quietly to touch three others. All had been cleanly cut. He could tell that from the jumping rays of the fire which danced now and again through the pines, bringing him light from the clearing.

He went back and stood leaning against the wagon. Steam came up from the kettle of water and hovered above the simmering stew.

"Supper's nearly ready, lady," he said softly.

She moaned again and turned uneasily.

He wished he had a canister of rum. Someone more silent and more cautious than the turkeys had already paid them a visit. It wasn't the time to tell her that all four oxen were gone.

He moved to the back of the wagon and took her hand in both his own. She clung to him gratefully, seeking strength.

"Frightened?"

"A little." Her fingers closed tighter. "The pains are coming more often now."

He was frightened, too. He'd seen men starved and frozen and cut to pieces with ball. He'd seen them dying, screaming for water. But he'd never seen one born. There was an unknown ritual to the coming of life, a kind of witchcraft belonging only to surgeons and ancient midwives—an art transcending the knowledge of mortal man.

"You'll be better when you have some tea."

He turned his thoughts eagerly from the unknown to the familiar, welcoming the Englishman's universal cure-all. It was true it had never failed him, and like his wife, he needed something to cling to. Tea was food and strength, furnishing energy in the heat of battle and cheerfulness during despondency. It enabled men to march when not one more dragging footstep was left in them. It was warmth in the winter, and coolness when heat waves shimmered over the smoking cannon. It was sustenance when the cramps of hunger ate at your insides. Surely it must have its place in easing the torture of birth as it could soften the ordeal of dying.

He left her and removed the smaller kettle from beside the fire, dropping in a handful of the hard dried leaves. He gave the mixture a stir, and stood uneasily, searching the surrounding wall of pine trees where nothing moved. When he poured the brew into a dipper, it was black and strong. From a jug he added some sweetening. Satisfied, he raised her again and let her sip it slowly, holding her against him until the dipper was empty.

"You eat now," she said. "I feel much better." But even as she said it, her face contracted, and he knew she was biting her lips to make no sound. He lowered her gently.

The stew was tasteless. He took the cauldron from the tripod and set it on the ground. It would serve them tomorrow. The

rest of the tea he drank down, preserving the leaves, which would have to steep again.

"Try to rest now."

"I am resting. You're tired, Major. You lie down."

"I'll lie out here beside the fire and keep it going. If you need me, call."

"It'll be a long time yet. Try to sleep."

"I'll try," he promised.

He took a thin blanket from the wagon, spread it out between the wheels and the fire, and before he sat down, added another lighter knot. The boiling pitch hissed, and flames and sparks soared to form a flaming shield. Without disturbing her, he got the two muskets and stood them up against the wheel. An old fowling piece was tucked in the other side of the wagon. He secured that, too, and as quietly removed from the wagon the full supply of powder and ball, making himself a tiny fortress on the blanket.

He believed that one lone man had stolen the oxen, or maybe two. There'd have been an attack without waiting had the raiding party been more. Now that the wagon was helpless to move they might return in force if they were Indians or bandits. If the theft was the work of escaping slaves, he and his wife might be let alone. Meantime, he'd be careful and sell out as dearly as possible. There was nothing else to do.

His back grew cold, and he draped the blanket about his shoulders, taking one of the muskets across his knees. Many times he heard a rustle, but it was only wind in the treetops.

The fire had died and twice been replenished when he heard his wife scream. Hours later, she gave birth to a son. He bathed the tiny, squalling mite, wrapped it in clean old linen, and laid it beside its mother. He had worked entirely on instinct to help her, and had no clear remembrance of anything he had done.

"Major." Her lips moved feebly. "I'm very tired."

"I can really call you 'Mother' now. We have a son."

She closed her eyes. After a while, he put his hand on her forehead and found it cold.

Across the clearing a shot flashed out from the pinewoods, then, closer, another one. He dropped behind the shelter of the fire, muskets, pistols, and fowling piece beside him.

Hideous and demonic in paint and feathers, figures broke from the trees, yelling and screaming. The man held his fire, then coolly picked out the nearest Creek and shot him. The Indian fell, his arms sprawled wide. Another was killed with one of the pistols.

It didn't seem to matter, for the iciness of his dead wife lying in the wagon had crept deep into his soul. He was praying softly as he fired:

"Take me if it be Thy will, O Heavenly Father, but let them spare my son."

2

THE BLACK SMUDGE of swampland bordering the circular clearing extended southward, following a stream, which some miles on widened to the dignity of calling itself a river. That, in turn, flowed into the great St. Johns, which, changing its course from north to east at Cowford, dumped its waters twenty miles eastward grandiloquently into the Atlantic.

About the point where the creek promised through widening to become a river, Dan McKetch, onetime rebel Colonial soldier and later a colonel of the East Florida Rangers, had set himself up a fortified plantation. The location was most strategic, for Dan McKetch was no more hospitably inclined than the sixty or seventy families who had joined him over a period of four hectic years since England had magnanimously ceded the province of Florida back to Spain.

The settlement, through careful cooperative effort and much hard work, had gradually taken on the status of a fortress. The swamp, impassable to anyone except the most skillful Indian trailer, formed its west wall. The pine trees on the other three sides of the square had been neatly interlaced with sharpened palmetto trunks leaning outwards over a deep, wide trench. Between the palmetto logs were built breastworks of bales of cotton and bags of sand. Protruding over these breastworks at nicely spaced points were the black muzzles of eight four-pounders and half a dozen six-pounders, an array of artillery which had effectually checked the ambitious desire of the English governor, Patrick Tonyn, and his Light Horse to destroy the camp some four years before.

Rather willingly, the retiring English governor had passed on to the new Spanish incumbent, Governor Vincente Manuel de Zéspedes, the headache of this square mile of outlawry, so snugly ensconced within a league of the well-traveled King's Road. After sending Colonel Antonio Fernandez with a detachment of Spanish dragoons to make a reconnaissance, Governor Zéspedes decided for

the time being that a policy of leniency might be the best course to follow. He would have liked to accept the retiring English governor's proffer of the British Light Horse to rid the district of the ubiquitous Dan McKetch and his followers. There was, however, a delicate problem involved, that of using British arms in Spanish territory.

The result was that Dan McKetch on Christmas Eve in 1787 felt quite secure and convivial in the sanctuary of his well-armed home, nicely furnished with the plunder from countless wagon trains, and occasionally populated with a series of more or less unwilling ladies whom McKetch had claimed as his own.

The house he occupied was square and raised from the sandy ground on stout hand-hewn timbers which formed supports driven deep into the soil. A wide rail porch encircled three sides, and at the front a flight of ten broad steps led down. The boards of the floor and walls were wide and still bore marks of plane and saw. Six smaller rooms opened from the one great living room, which was over forty feet long. Overhead, reached by a stout cypress ladder, two more rooms served as slave quarters and jail. They were also used at times as a lookout tower, for the front window of one commanded a view across the gates of the stockade to the trail which led to the King's Road.

The house was rough but strong, built to stand against the rushing winds which sometimes swept through with power enough to batter the pine trees down. Hand-forged wrought-iron hinges and a bolt two feet in length and almost a hand's breadth in thickness adorned the inside of the stout front door.

In striking contrast to the roughness of the house were the furnishings of the living room. Huge candelabras, heirlooms of some Boston family, had reached the end of their trail in the Florida wilderness to adorn a polished, Waterford-glass-laden buffet at one end of the room.

At the other end, above the wide fireplace with its burning logs, was a mantelpiece which might have come from the same Boston home. Pendent from the raw board ceiling was a crystal chandelier where, in celebration of Christmas Eve, fifty more candles dripped and glittered. The chandelier had once been the pride of a North Virginian home.

A tablecloth of purest linen hung close to the floor around an oblong table, which could easily seat fourteen.

There were six people seated at the table now—four men and two women, although empty cranberry glass goblets, a few soiled

plates, and a streak of spilled wine marring the cloth showed that others had been there before. McKetch sat at the table's head, presiding over the bombo, a potent mixture of cinnamon, sweetened water, and Antigua rum, which half-filled the symmetry of a silver tureen. He was a little drunk, but his dark mustache stuck out on each side in points as fierce and sharp as ever. His shirt was unspotted and the cascade of ruffles down his front and at his wrists was scrupulously clean.

The girl at his right had golden hair, parted in the middle and rolled softly over her forehead. She still looked a child, scarcely more than seventeen. She wore a dress of plum-colored velvet, tight at the bodice and cut very low in front and behind. She was toying nervously with one of the red glass goblets, and suddenly her large blue eyes filled with tears and one rolled down her cheek. She closed her small hand about a napkin, fine as a lady's lace kerchief, and made an attempt to brush the tear away unseen.

McKetch's dark eyes noted the gesture. He shoved back the heavy brocaded armchair, closing his long fingers tight about the upholstered arms, and rose to his feet, leaning slightly over the table.

"Christ's blood, madam! It's Christmas Eve. Can't we have some life—some wine—some rum and some laughter? It's scarcely an hour upon midnight."

"M'sieu—" the girl muttered. Her lips were trembling.

"M'sieu!" mocked McKetch. "Because your cutpurse of a father, Jacques, must be in bed with his squawking hens every night at sundown, does he fear that your dining with me will lose him your marketable virginity? It's you French who say you're really free. Hell's molten lead! If I so much as wink an eye while passing your house, we have a bloody scene."

The woman at his left was older, but even more beautiful than the girl. She smoothed the waist of her long, yellow satin gown, pulling the bust line tight over breasts that were firm and full.

"She's just a child, Dan, you must remember. Her father'll cowhide her once she's stripped for bed, if she disobeys him."

"A pox on you, Amy!" said Dan McKetch. "You swallow the whole thing with delight as you might gulp a sweetmeat. You'll frighten the child."

"I frighten her? Really, Dan." Amy's smile was serene.

McKetch turned more quietly to the girl. "I'll not be one to get you into trouble." He stepped behind her chair and pulled it from the table. "I agree. It's best you go home, Celine."

He addressed himself to two men farther down the table. "You see her home safely, Mark and Andrew. It's dark outside, and there are blacks about, with rum flowing free as Wolf Creek water."

Mark, the younger, grinned, and was up with alacrity, a handsome lad with broad shoulders bulking under a doeskin vest, trimmed Seminole fashion with a fringe of shell.

"I'll take her myself. Andrew don't need to come." He pointed to the black-bearded Andrew, who had not stirred or moved from his seat across the table.

"You'll both take her," said McKetch. "You can both see her home, old and young. Then there'll be no dalliance under Lemain's front window, with him waiting inside, whip in hand. What's more, you can wait about for a while and tell Jacques Lemain that he'll hang by his thumbs for an hour should you hear Celine scream."

Andrew, the older, said nothing, but left his seat with a scowl and walked around the table to join Mark. Celine dropped them all a curtsy and went out between the two.

McKetch sat down and glowered at the other man left at the table. Pure white hair hung to the man's shoulders to end in a perfect upturned curl. His coat was of the finest black broadcloth. In front, his well-kept beard hung white and long, and was so thick and grew so high that his full, round face seemed hidden. Surmounting his prominent high-bridged nose, two keen, kindly, humorous eyes peered through, set like sapphires under his thick, white brows.

"Christ's blood, Doctor Zeke!" McKetch blurted out. "You're spiritual adviser to my collection of cutthroats, and you sit there straining bombo through your beard and saying nothing when you hear that one of them is thrashing his daughter, full-matured. Speak up, man, for the love of God! Does it mean nothing to you?"

Doctor Ezekiel Buckhart slowly moved his chair until he was sitting sideways to the table. Candlelight struck on his silver shoe buckles. His almost transparent hand stroked his beard from chin to waistline. "Where there's nothing spiritual, how could a man of God advise, Daniel?" His lips seemed not to move, but his voice was deep and rumbling. "You blaspheme with every word you speak. You lust and play the lecher. You covet, sin, and rob and steal, and fight and kill. Then when rum has stupefied your senses, you want me to pray for you."

"You lie through that mask of hypocritical hair," yelled Dan McKetch. "I want no mumbled prayers from you. I live my life as

I find myself forced to live it." He reached out his hand for that of the woman beside him. "I'm happy with Amy here."

"You'd be happier with the Lord," said Doctor Zeke, "if you loved her in your heart and had the spirit to let me unite you in holy wedlock."

McKetch dipped out a goblet of the bombo, tasted it, and spat it on the floor. He clapped his hands. A mulatto girl came in and stood beside the table.

McKetch said, "Bring more! I'll mix the next myself. This last is so weak, it must have been drawn from the flanks of a mare." The mulatto girl disappeared, and returned in a moment with sweetened water, cinnamon, and rum.

McKetch stood up and went to work. The candles in the room were burning low. When the bombo was mixed to his liking, he filled another goblet and tossed it down, then handed one to Amy and Doctor Buckhart.

Outside of the house, a fire was lighted and began to burn high. The flames reflected through the distorted window glass, touching all the furnishings with a ruddy glare. The three people turned and looked. Black figures were gathering around the fire, and shortly after, voices were raised in song.

McKetch walked to the window and stood looking out. He clapped his hands and ordered another log for the fireplace when the slave girl came in. It was getting cold in the room. From his place, he said, "We've been a long time together, Ezekiel. We've seen much blood, and much death, and much betrayal. I asked you a question. Why did you remain so silent about the chastisement of that girl?"

"There's a saying older than I am," Buckhart rumbled. "Spare the rod and spoil the child.' "

"Then I must be God's handiwork," said Dan, "for the rod was never spared on me."

"I'll grant," said Buckhart, "that knowing you, I can find but little good it's done though your bottom seldom tires in the saddle. Once you were in uniform, I've heard they had to beat you more."

"And why?" Dan shouted. "Because one of their bastard officers wanted Black Storm! Well, the god-damned United States lost both the horse and me. I've made them pay well for that hundred lashes to rolling drums in the public square."

"Dan," Amy protested soothingly, "must you always let Ezekiel rouse you to anger? He's laughing back of his beard at your ranting as he always laughs."

"Aye," said Buckhart, "we've heard it before. And you deserted and came down here with Browne, whose toes were burned off by the Liberty Boys in Savannah. And were you happier as colonel in your East Florida Rangers, serving the English King?"

"I was a man," said McKetch, "and Black Storm was with me—not serving as a mattress for some fat hog's buttocks." He began to pace the floor.

"I've heard they rewarded you highly." Doctor Zeke laughed softly, and his blue eyes glittered. "When Mother England abandoned you and your East Florida Rangers to the tender care of the Spanish, didn't you get a letter of thanks and sympathy from His Most Gracious Majesty, the King?"

McKetch stopped his pacing and stood with his back to the fire. "Damn you, Ezekiel! Some day you'll goad me too far. I hate them all, and you know it. Those Federalists, prattling of their freedom. Those lobsterbacks who dumped me when my usefulness was through. The bloody Spanish, who'd like to tie a hempen rope beneath my chin. Well, I've made them pay, and I'll make them pay more."

"And the price is your soul," said Buckhart.

"Let it fry!" said McKetch. He stepped to the table for another goblet of bombo. "It's Christmas, and no country of my own to go to. That's what sticks thorns under my skin." He turned to Amy. "Drink up, woman, and don't sit there so silent. We'll feast and dance tomorrow. We'll have turkey, and quail, and beef, and fish, and Spanish wine, and a boar roasted whole. *This* is my country, a place of plenty. Let all who live here be happy. It's a kingdom where Dan McKetch is king."

There was a noise outside. Hurried steps bounded up on the porch, and someone knocked at the door. McKetch flung it open.

A man stood outside in leather coat and breeches, a Spanish musket in his hand. "There's firing, sir!"

"Where?" snapped McKetch. "Don't stand there, man, and blubber."

"Just north of here. Not very far."

"Where were you?"

"In Cowford, sir. I turned from the King's Road and heard firing as I was riding in."

McKetch's figure straightened. He took three strides to a corner, unhooked a horn, and walked to the porch, where he winded a blast that went rocketing out through the pine trees. A silence fell on the blacks about the fire in front of the house. Water was dumped

on the flaming logs, raising a cloud of ruby-colored steam. More water came, and the fire died. An orderly confusion followed as figures began to run.

McKetch came back in and took his pistols from a peg on the wall. "Do you come, Doctor Zeke?"

"Aye," said Buckhart. "I come as always when we have a call."

Two horses were led to the steps of the porch, Doctor Buckhart's gray mare, Savanna, and McKetch's great Black Storm. They were already saddled and armed with holstered muskets and a pouch of powder and ball. McKetch slid into his bright blue coat with its silver buttons, and seized his hat with its sweeping plume.

Amy had stood, and was trembling. "Be careful, Dan."

"I'm always careful, lass." He stooped and kissed her. "Nothing living can catch me on Black Storm."

"A bullet's swifter," she whispered. "Be careful."

Buckhart found his soft black hat and placed it atop his snowy hair. Together he and McKetch went down from the porch and mounted. Amy watched without speaking. McKetch's sharp eyes swept the camp, darkened now except for the sputtering fireflies where men with lighted matches stood ready at the cannon.

He and Buckhart rode to the gates and were joined by others. McKetch said, "We'll take ten; that's all," and named the names in the darkness. "Five will go with Buckhart and five with me. I'll ride north through the pine woods, and Doctor Buckhart east. We'll circle to meet and scout in on the noise of firing. It's probably some drunken Creeks who've jumped a wagon train. Watch for an ambush, Doctor Zeke."

The party rode out and the gates shut tight behind them. McKetch and the five horsemen with him straggled out automatically into a single file. Black Storm moved in silence, setting his hoofs down on pine needles and sand with the daintiness of some titled lady treading a *pas de seul.*

McKetch had no worry about Buckhart and the other party. The benevolent appearance of Doctor Zeke had fooled too many men in his day. Despite his age, an astronomical figure unknown to Dan or anyone, the patriarch sat his mare, Savanna, with the posture of a British lancer. His blue eyes were sometimes keener than Dan's and every bit as deadly behind the sights of pistol or gun. He could travel the woods in daylight or darkness with the speed and silence of a bearded spirit.

McKetch reined in and listened. There was no sound of firing, but somewhat northward he heard the hoot of an owl. An instant

later, to the west, it was answered by another. There was a creak of saddle leather, and one of his followers pulled up beside him.

"Some of those bloody Creeks, as I thought." McKetch grinned at the other horseman through the darkness. "They've roamed through these woods since the beginning of time and never yet learned the last note of a hooting owl. Well, we'll push on. There'll be no more firing, for whatever it is, their work is done."

A little later he rode out into a clearing and pulled up short. There was smoke in the air, and the smell of burned powder. To his right were the last few embers of a dying fire.

Black Storm shied as Buckhart, on Savanna, loomed up, ghost-like, beside him.

"We've already circled the clearing," Doctor Zeke's voice rumbled low. "There's a wagon yon with a dead man lying beside the fire. He's been stripped and scalped."

"Listen!" McKetch reached out to Buckhart and closed a hand on his arm. "The bombo's making sounds in my brain. I'll take an oath I heard an infant squall."

It came again through the darkness, plaintive and very thin. "Build up the fire," McKetch told one of the men, "and you others take post about this clearing."

He rode forward slowly with Buckhart and both of them dismounted near the wagon. A few minutes later, the fire crackled and the clearing was light again.

Buckhart was looking into the wagon. "The Lord provideth," he said slowly, "and equally taketh away."

McKetch came up and stood beside him. "The woman's dead?"

"Aye," said Buckhart, "but not killed, it seems to me, for the savages haven't harmed her. And they left this crying babe beside her."

McKetch reached in and picked up the linen-wrapped baby, then slowly unwound the cloth from about it. There was nothing else left in the wagon except the woman's body on the feather mattress and a thin flooring of straw and hay.

McKetch took off his own blue coat, wrapped it about the baby, then handed the bundle to Buckhart. "He's yours, Doctor Zeke. It's time we had a boy in camp, and it'll be a fair miracle tomorrow when I tell them all that one of your age has had himself a son."

The dead man was lifted tenderly and laid beside his wife in the wagon. As they put him in, McKetch saw something glittering and dug down into the straw and hay. He picked from the wagon

a golden emblem bearing the arms of His Majesty's Field Artillery, and held it to the light of the fire.

"Here's a name for the boy," he said, and handed the emblem to Buckhart. "Artillery Armes. He can wear this badge and the name till his dying day."

Doctor Buckhart said, "There's a leather sack, Dan, hidden here beside the woman." He pulled the drawstring, and a stream of gold coins rolled into his hand. "God's gifted him with a fortune."

"Or us," said McKetch. "I wouldn't know, but the gold's the child's. You'll save it for him, Doctor Zeke, until he's old enough. We'll hitch to the wagon now and pull it to camp with the bodies in it. Tomorrow you'll christen the baby, 'Artillery Armes,' and bury his parents with a decent word from the Scriptures."

"Aye," said Buckhart. "'Twill be a good deed for Christmas Day."

BOOK TWO

1800

★

THE BOY

★

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL William Augustus Bowles was losing. He dumped the last four pieces from his buckskin purse onto the shiny mahogany table in Dan McKetch's living room, and dealt another hand.

Sitting slightly in back of him, Artillery Armes bit his underlip. He had been there two hours and was fighting an almost hopeless battle against two things—to keep from interfering in the general's play, and to remain noticeably unconscious of Angela Miranda, the dark-eyed, sixteen-year-old girl who kept smiling at him mockingly from out of the shadows across the table, where she sat behind Dan.

Artillery was only twelve, but he knew that Angela was the current favorite in the ever-changing line of girls who had passed through Dan McKetch's adventuresome career. He wondered sometimes how Amy, Dan's faded but still beautiful wife, stood it so patiently. Perhaps experience had taught her how short a time it would be before Dan's fickle affections for each passing beauty began to stray.

Artillery could see with half an eye that the general knew nothing about All-Four. Playing All-Four with Dan McKetch, Doctor Ezekiel Buckhart, and Melchor Salazar, a saturnine, smiling Spaniard, would have been an education for the finest gambler in the province of Florida. McKetch and Doctor Zeke never cheated, nor did they stand for any shadiness on the part of other players. They didn't need to. Artillery had filled in with them in their games since he was seven years old. He knew that at Whist, Brag, or All-Four any stranger who overvalued his skill and cared to back it with good, hard gold was throwing money away.

"Sink me!" said the general, as McKetch picked up his winnings. "You've milked me till my purse is as thin as a dry cow's teat!" He took a drink of Spanish wine, and his teeth shone white. "My first cards were learned in His Majesty's Army in Jamaica at the age of thirteen. Demn'd if I've ever held worse than tonight!"

"I've not done too well myself," said Salazar.

McKetch threw back his head and laughed. "You started too late, Salazar, and you, William, too. You should come sometime to take lessons from the lad, Artillery, who sits behind you."

"He'll teach no man to play for money, nor gamble himself!" Doctor Zeke growled, his blue eyes menacing under his heavy white brows.

McKetch laughed again. "Hark ye, William. There's words of wisdom from a man who once had a title, a castle, and two thousand acres of English countryside, and passed them over the gaming tables to players of greater skill. The lad was twelve last Christmas, and Ezekiel's already whipped him full of French and Spanish and Shakespeare and the Bible. He rides like the wind and shoots with the straightness of an arrow." He turned to Buckhart. "Would you keep the lad in swaddling clothes until the day he beds his first Maroon?"

"I'll keep him from sin," said Doctor Zeke, "till he grows to a man. The lad has a fortune, General Bowles. 'Twas left him by his father and mother, who were killed by the Creeks on the night he was born. I can do naught but pass on to him the things that I've learned, and one of them is that gold fades fast where a man mixes cards and wine. If he heeds my words, he'll have enough when I'm gone to buy a herd and be a cattleman. 'Tis all this country's fit for, and all that it will be fit for during the length of his stay."

"You mock me with such a statement." Bowles twirled the stem of his wineglass between his fingers. "Cattle—forsooth! You tell the lad to buy cattle and become a grazier in a country ruled by the puling Spanish? Gad, sir! This is the place where men take what they want. A herd of cattle in Georgia vanishes by night, only to be sold in Florida the following day. The man who buys it is a fool, Doctor Buckhart. Unless he protects it with guns and cannon, he buys it only to have it immediately whisked away. The Spanish—paugh!"

Salazar smiled. "Though you speak of my own people, Senor General, your words ring true!"

Bowles pushed back his chair. The candlelight gleamed on his

doeskin trappings of a full Creek chief. Artillery stared, fascinated at the intricate embroidered designs of tiny white shells interspersed with silver, the gold and red braid twisted into numberless knots, the buskins with silver buckles shining against the palest of gray. He'd seen lots of Indians, but never one dressed like General Bowles. His voice was as rich as his trappings and made you listen to his every word. He spoke, ignoring Salazar.

"Have you ever bought cattle, Dan McKetch? Or you, Doctor Buckhart? Come, be true."

"We breed our own," said Dan McKetch.

"Aye," said Buckhart.

Salazar said, "True, senor, true."

"Agreed," said Bowles. "And you raise the corn and the cane and the tobacco, and make your rum, and cut your timber. Did you buy the seeds to start? Or the saws?" He waved a hand about the room. "You live like lords I've met in England. Did you buy these fine furnishings—the chandelier above my head, the glassware glistening on the sideboard there?"

"I took what I needed," said Dan McKetch, "when I was sold out to Spain along with this province by the English you love so well."

"And you keep it with cannon," said General Bowles. "Because Spain is weak she snaps at the lawless with the strength of a toothless woman. So today they flock in from Georgia, the cattle thieves and the gougers, who pop men's eyes from their sockets with their hands entwined in their hair. Without your cannon there's no protection for decent men."

"We live on our own today," said Buckhart. "We raided only because your England betrayed us. I have seen the great plantations grow to weeds and the families leave for the Bahamas and Nova Scotia—families who'd worked for thirty years to build homes for their children. Their paths, when they left, were rivers of tears."

"You might call on the United States for protection," Bowles said bitterly. "The dunderheads could have had this land for the asking at the close of their revolution. England wanted it so little that she gave it back to Spain."

Buckhart chuckled. "A second trouble's already brewing. Thomas Jefferson's eyes are turned this way, and England's, too. Might I be wrong in thinking that all the brothers who fought have an itch in their pants to get this province again?"

"We all may live," said General Bowles, "to see the time that

someone takes it from Spain. Meantime, you keep your pleasant farms behind your cannon."

"They're rusted," said Buckhart. "We're through with thieving."

"Yet you keep the cannon," said Bowles. He got to his feet, and Artillery saw how tall he was. "You're going to rust like your cannon, McKetch. There are things you need, man, and I know it. The Spanish want you out of here. You daren't trade with Panton and Leslie—there are dastards among the English as elsewhere. The pious Panton, stirring trouble amongst the Seminoles to sell them more guns and tomahawks, wants you out of here as he wants me out. He's bribed with gold every mongrel official of Spain."

The English trading company of Panton and Leslie was a familiar name to Artillery. Panton, the richest man in the province, traded extensively with the Indians.

McKetch's wife had come in and was standing at the far end of the room, listening quietly. Her face showed white in the candlelight. She spoke up suddenly. "What ill wind brought you, General Bowles? You're an actor, in truth. I've heard that you even walked the stage. I've seen you here in years gone by in your uniform of red and gold, with your silver-hilted saber. Each time you've come our men have ridden away, and death has followed."

"Christ's blood, woman, you're overbold!" shouted Dan McKetch.

"With reason," Buckhart rebuked him. "We're living in peace. There's naught we need nor cannot make nor raise ourselves for the past five years. If our guns are rusty, it's because the Spanish have let us alone. Amy's right. We know you, Bowles, and know where you're heading. My voice is against you if you've come here with those warriors who are camped outside of our gates right now to ask McKetch to ride again. There's naught could be worth it. We're peaceful here. Why arouse the wrath of sleeping Spain?"

"I'll be quick to business," said General Bowles. "Spain's not sleeping; she's dying. With the men in your camp and the warriors I have from Chief Kinhaizee, we can break her back. Once that's done, the United States or England will take over Florida. You can spike your cannon and have no fear again. I've taken a schooner, the *Sheerwater,* loaded to her rails with stores and ammunition—"

"There are those who've called you 'pirate' before," said Buckhart.

"Quit muttering through your beard," McKetch broke in. "Say on, William. How can we break the back of Spain?"

"I need your whites for leaders. The stores of the *Sheerwater*

have gone to three hundred Mickasookees—Kinhaizee's braves—who are ready to aid me. The Spanish fort, San Marcos, on the Gulf, is badly manned."

"And why is Kinhaizee friendly?" Melchor Salazar wanted to know. "We live not entirely uninformed, and rumor has reached us he hated you and was close to Spain."

The general laughed. "You speak with the usual Spanish caution, senor. An Indian turns like a leaf in the wind. The commander of the garrison, thinking to lay me by the heels, called Kinhaizee in. It was the commander's wife who turned him by objecting to Kinhaizee's smoking in her presence, and calling him a 'vermilion chimney.' It's that same ignorance of the Indians that has lost the world for Spain. I'm whiter than any Spaniard, and English besides, yet the Creeks have made me leader of their nation."

"To take Fort St. Marks!" Buckhart exclaimed. "You're mad, Bowles. Or else you're flushed with wine and power. Have you not had enough of being a Spanish prisoner in the Philippines? 'Twas but three years ago you escaped from them on Ascension Island when they were taking you to your death in Spain."

"I hate them," said Bowles. "I've escaped from them once. They're weaker now. 'Twould be easier to do it again."

"You've dined too much in England with William Pitt and the Duke of Portland," Buckhart told him. "Your head's inflated with titles. Next, you'll be trying to sack St. Augustine."

"You're older than you look, Ezekiel," McKetch broke in. "You forget the days when you and I and William fought together. Seven hundred Seminoles failed to take us at the behest of Panton and Leslie, though they were led in a group by Chiefs Kennard, Payne, Bowlegs, and White King."

"I've said the fort is badly manned," the general continued. "We can lay it siege and take it without the loss of a man. Their supplies are short. If we sit and wait, eventually the garrison must give in. It's because we fought together before that I need you with me."

"We go," McKetch said suddenly. "Salazar?"

"*Si*!"

"You seem full of doubts, Ezekiel. Do you come along, or do you stay here to save what's left of the camp from sin?"

"I'd hoped 'twas past." For a moment the doctor combed his beard with his fingers. His firm, broad shoulders straightened. "Aye, Dan. We ride together as always when we have a call."

Artillery stood up slowly. His legs were cramped and his knees

felt funny where his hands had been gripping them tightly through it all. Angela's limpid eyes were watching.

The general swung around and looked at Artillery, studying the lines of his sturdy neck, his patrician face, with its firm, straight nose and sensitive nostrils. He moved his gaze higher, pausing to stare at Artillery's clear blue eyes, so full of candor, and the thickness of his yellow hair, cut long enough to rest upon his shoulders. He put a hand under Artillery's chin and turned his face toward the candles.

"Demmit," he said, "for a boy of a dozen years, you're passing tall. Sink me, I'd like to paint you. Have you oils, McKetch, and a brush?"

"None," said McKetch. He called, without turning, "Amy, bring crayon and paper."

"I'll do better," said Bowles. "Bring me quills and an inkpot, and I'll sketch the lad as I see him."

"He's big for his breeches now," said Buckhart.

"You've tried to teach him everything. Watching me work, Doctor Buckhart, may start him wanting to draw. Lad, be still."

The general sat at the table and spread paper before him, then took several feathers from a china jar and tested them against his thumbnail until he found the proper quill. Angela came with a candelabra to stand close beside Artillery, who had frozen into the unnatural stiffness of a Spanish sentry. She held the candelabra high so that the light poured against Artillery's features and cascaded over the general's shoulder.

Everyone in the room had gathered to watch, grouped behind the general's chair. Artillery was conscious of their breathing, but for the moment he and Angela and the general, scratchily sketching, were the only ones there.

He was doubly conscious of Angela, a portrait herself beneath the flickering candles. The daring of his own thoughts frightened him. He could sense her breast against his arm, and feel her breathing. Was she pressing closer than necessary? He followed the line of her slender arm from her firm, brown hand which held the glittering candlestick to the bareness of her shoulder. He wanted to look farther, but didn't dare.

He forced his eyes to the table where the general was making magic. A single line had become a nose, and another an ear. The general's long fingers dipped the quill and made a bold black curve. Artillery saw his own features leap from the paper—the softness of candlelight striking against his own face, making gold of his own

yellow hair. Angela was deliberately pressing closer and breathing very softly and swiftly.

The general spattered sand from a shaker across the paper, dumped it and blew it clean, then held it up so the light struck full. Next to Artillery, Angela sighed.

"Christ's blood!" said McKetch. "You *are* an artist, William. The boy's right there."

"Some day some woman may treasure it." Bowles' hawklike face turned suddenly and swept a glance over Angela and Artillery. "And it may be sooner than we warrant, and there may be more than one who'll want it! That's dangerous, lad, to have too many. I've kept myself free, though it's a life that's lonely. Though I'm not yet forty, I've found that one alone can bring more trouble than most fighting men can bear."

He handed the sketch to Artillery, then pushed back his chair. "Do you sound your horn, Dan, and we'll be riding."

Angela took the sketch from Artillery's fingers, and whispered in Spanish, "*Hermoso*! I'd love to have it."

"Yes," said Dan, "the time moves swiftly."

Artillery snatched the sketch from Angela, and flushed. He was conscious of McKetch's stare. "It's yours, Doctor Zeke." He handed the sketch to Buckhart.

The old man stood for a long time before he spoke. Finally he muttered, "Thank ye, lad. It's a gift I'll long remember, and guard with care."

Angela moved away from Artillery and carried the candelabra to the sideboard at the other end of the room. He tried not to see the shadow of her maturing figure and the rich, blue blackness of her hair.

"I want to ride with you, Doctor Zeke," Artillery broke out. "I'm tired of books and farming. It's time I took my place with the men, sir."

"Hark, now!" said McKetch. "The lad's quite right, Ezekiel. You've guarded him like a woman. He can outride us all on Black Cloud, and outshoot us. Yet you'll not allow him a league from the paddock. I could have presented him with a carthorse last Christmas instead of our speediest mare."

Doctor Zeke stared down at the sketch in his hand. "The carthorse might have been better, Dan, if Fort San Marcos is your idea of breaking in a lad of twelve. It wouldn't ride him so swift to death."

"Death?" Bowles repeated. "You jest! The fort's ill-manned, and I was in the British Army—"

"Aye," said Buckhart, "at the age of thirteen. But I have no plans for this lad to be a general. My plans are for him to be a man with some thoughts inside of love, and God, and poetry. I want him to learn all he can for as long as he can. I think that's what his father wanted the night he was killed out there." He turned toward Artillery. "You can go, lad, if you wish to, and I'll stay behind. You're as good as any of the men, and better, and that includes the general, but until I feel that you're ready, I'll ride on no errand of murder with you."

Artillery said, "I'll stay, sir," and left the room to stand outside on the broad, wide porch where he could hide in the darkness and watch the others ride away. The candlelights were blurry.

From inside he heard the general say, "Sink me, Doctor Buckhart. There's a lot of love for that stripling hidden behind your thatch of whitened hair."



ARTILLERY LAY STRETCHED on a cot close by an open window. A penetrating ray of sun struck hot on his naked back and arms, burned to a deep mahogany. Freckles on his face and straight, firm nose stood out in sharp contrast under the thickness of his yellow hair. Chin in hands on propped-up elbows, he stared gloomily at a history of England resting against the cot head. His bare legs and feet moved slowly up and down in a rhythm of concentration beneath short leather breeches, the only piece of clothing he wore.

It was very hot for early spring. The air in the living room of the four room house he shared with Doctor Buckhart seemed thick and unbreathable. A large, black wasp zoomed in through the window, legs trailing behind him, circled the room in search of a spot near the ceiling to start a new mud dwelling, and obviously finding the heat unbearable, turned and zoomed out again.

Artillery's deep blue eyes followed the insect's exit and turned longingly toward the swampland, a quarter of a mile away above ripening corn. It would be nice to let the history of England molder in its own dust and go down to the swamp where he could lie in the milk-warm water of Wolf Creek, hidden safe under the foliage from the broiling sun.

Maybe he could float down the creek to the St. Johns River

and swim on, hour after hour, until he reached the cooling sea. He might even continue on to England, the place where Doctor Buckhart had come from. He loved Doctor Zeke, but his and the doctor's ideas of learning differed widely. The doctor believed that the somber collection of books shelfed around the living room held everything.

Or perhaps it was the Bible that held everything. Certainly Doctor Zeke could quote it without end, from thirty minutes of morning prayer while Artillery's eyes were still heavy with sleep to pertinent points driven into Artillery's naked body and thence to his mind by the swish of whip and cane. Dan swore and all the men, but Artillery had learned quickly to confine his copying of manly habits to such times as Doctor Zeke was absent.

Indolence and shirking brought fast reprisals. Curiosity, when applied to languages, history, mathematics, or the law of the woods, could bring a chuckle and a word of praise from the stern old man, but Artillery had learned to sort his curiosity with caution. Let him hint at interest in the coming of babies, McKetch's sly remarks about certain women, or the fascinating formation of the bodies of the little girls who bathed in Wolf Creek, and instantly he ran athwart the Bible. Also, such dereliction caused him much pain.

Artillery was certain he could learn many more things of value if allowed to prowl about freely on his own. Take the history book, for instance:

> "The death of Charles V in 1415, which followed soon after that of Edward III, and the youth of his son, Charles VI, put the two kingdoms for some time in a similar situation, and it was not to be apprehended that either of them during a minority would be able to make much advantage from the weakness of the other."

He had read that over twenty times, and still it didn't make sense. Who cared anything about 1415 in 1800? With a few exceptions, all of Doctor Buckhart's books were dull. The exceptions were the ones on cards and guns and horses, and a few old copies of *The Sporting Magazine,* dated 1793 and 1794, which had come into Fernandina on a schooner from England.

Artillery thumbed down the page corner and snapped the history book closed. There was an excitement about cards. Doctor Zeke had taught him Cribbage and All-Four. He'd learned Whist, too, although he never said so. He had soaked it in by sitting

quietly, evening after evening, watching Dan McKetch, Doctor Buckhart and two other men play.

He left the cot and restored the history to its place in the bookcase. Doctor Zeke was good at cards, although that meant little, for Doctor Zeke was good at everything. Maybe it was because he read so much.

Artillery looked longingly at some of the books—*Short Treatise on the Game of Whist,* by Edmund Hoyle, entered in Stationers' hall, London, November 17, 1742; *The Court Gamester* by Richard Seymour, 1719—more interesting studies than history.

He'd heard plenty of card talk, too, on the nights when Doctor Zeke and Dan sat late over the bombo, forgetting it was past his bedtime—talk about how Benjamin Franklin went to Paris in 1767 and introduced the variety of Whist known as Boston—the rage in Paris during the Revolutionary War. He'd learned, too, that Whist was so popular in Italy that the boxes at the opera in Florence were provided with card tables so that listeners to the opera might not be interrupted in their play. That had happened since he was born.

Artillery opened *The Court Gamester* to the chapter on "Brag" and read:

> "Brag: The endeavour to impose on the judgment of the rest who play, and particularly on the person who chiefly offers to oppose you, by boasting or bragging of the cards in your hand. Those who by fashioning their looks and gestures, can give a proper air to their actions, as will so deceive an unskilful antagonist, that sometimes a pair of fives, trays or deuces, in such a hand, with the advantage of his composed countenance, and subtle manner of overawing the other, shall out-brag a much greater hand, and win the stakes, with great applause and laughter on his side from the whole company."

He closed the pamphlet regretfully, and restored it to the shelf. He was risking a caning by not getting his lessons done, but his only real holidays were the times Doctor Zeke was away.

Yet there was an air of despondency left with the settlement when the fighting force was gone. The women and children in the fifty scattered farmhouses and the handful of older men, left to man the cannon, always seemed doubly sober. Despite his freedom from lessons and chores, the somberness had stayed overnight with Artillery and was marring the heat and sunshine.

That was one of the troubles with his home that he couldn't understand. New families came in, and new children joined Doctor Buckhart's classes in the barnlike structure McKetch had built for a school. About the time Artillery became friendly with the children, the family might move away.

The Lemains had gone the year before, and Artillery had always been fond of the golden-haired Celine. She had been very kind to him, taught him how to play draughts and chess, and helped him with his French. He had liked Jacques, too, and Celine's mother, a laughing, jolly woman, who had fed him delicious cookies. Then there'd been some trouble, which he couldn't understand—something between Celine and Amy—and the Lemains had piled all their possessions in a wagon and left one day.

He found a pair of moccasins and pulled them on. His feet were tough, but he knew the heat of the scorching sand. He went outside and stood for a moment shielding his eyes from the sun. A pointer and two hounds came out from under the house and wagged their tails half-heartedly. Artillery saw that their pan was empty, and drew some water from the well. The dogs grouped themselves around the pan, lapping eagerly.

He went out to the barn where Black Cloud whinnied her greeting. He rubbed her soft nose, led her to the water trough, and let her drink, then put her back in the stall again. He wasn't going to ride her unnecessarily on such a hot day.

He started slowly swampward, scuffing his feet through the heavy sand. Beyond the cornfield lay ten acres of Cuba tobacco. The sharp smell struck at his nostrils, and he paused but a second to wave at Martone, a giant black, who was watering the crop with a mixture of strong soapsuds, leaking from a large pot pierced with small holes.

Artillery hated tobacco, which required constant attention and meant work every day. First, the seeds were sown in December. The ground had to be finely pulverized. Then it had to be kept constantly damp. Then the plants had to be set out in the plowed manured field. The work had only begun, for something new attacked it every day: cut-grubs, cutting down the stalks; ants, that pierced each hill and covered the leaves with sand; large, green caterpillars, which, unless they were picked off early, would leave the stalk quite bare; then the small-striped caterpillar; and, lastly, the large-striped tobacco worm, which fed on the leaves and cut them full of holes.

His back got tired, thinking about the labor, and he hurried

on his way. Near the swamp, he stopped and looked at the house that had belonged to Jacques Lemain. It was deserted now, and the garden grew wild behind it. He went up on the porch and looked in through a sashless window. Glass was scarce, and new families coming into the settlement often awaited their turn, putting up with open windows, or sometimes using sheets of thin, translucent skin. The glass had been removed to another house after the Lemains' departure.

He didn't go inside, for there were too many memories of pleasant evenings spent with the Lemains. He had started on when a yapping came from back of the house, so unexpected through the afternoon's quiet that it checked him into standing quite still. It sounded like the bark of a trapped or wounded puppy. He walked around to the back of the house, alert for snakes, which liked deserted gardens.

The barking ceased. He waited a minute, then rapped with his fist on the wall of the house, and it started again. It was somewhere above his head near the eaves. He looked around, but found nothing he could climb up on, so he went inside through a battered back door. The rear of the house was a storeroom with a single small window, and the light was very dim.

The barking stopped. Artillery slapped the wall a couple of times and it started again, louder than before. He tried to locate the source more accurately, but the noise seemed all around him. Finally, he decided it came from above his head in a corner, but, for the life of him, he couldn't imagine how a puppy could have gotten trapped such a distance from the floor.

By reaching up, he was able to get a fingerhold on the top of the inside wall. Instantly, the barking ceased. He pulled himself up easily. An instant later, he was staring into a small, round eye, which winked at him complacently. The eye was set in a garden frog, just half the size of his hand.

"Hell's lead!" he muttered, aping McKetch, and added, *"Sacre nom de chien!"*

It was a pleasure not to have Doctor Zeke around so that he might swear untrammeled. As he lowered himself to the floor, perspiration was pouring down his back in a stream. He looked up toward the barking frog, and added, in Spanish, "May a chinch crawl in your blinking eye."

He went out into the sun again, grinning a little at his own stupidity. There was one more farmhouse before he reached the swamp, the home of Melchor Salazar and his family. A boy, a few

years older than Artillery, was busy with a hoe in the garden.

"*Salud!* Damien," Artillery gave him greeting in Spanish. "It's too hot to work today."

Damien straightened and leaned on his hoe. He had black, straight hair, almost like that of an Indian, and swarthy skin. Artillery liked him because he always had a ready smile and sang a lot of Spanish songs, accompanying himself on the guitar. Damien had promised, when he found the time, to teach Artillery to play.

"You're lucky." Damien grinned. "You'd be working, too, if Doctor Buckhart wasn't away. *Mi papà* went also, but my mother stays to see that the work is done."

Artillery said, "I'm going down to lie in the creek. Maybe you could come along."

Damien shook his head. "Not today. I must stay near home while *mi papà* is gone."

Artillery walked on. He rarely thought of having a father and mother, except around the time of Christmas and his birthday. Then he went with Doctor Buckhart and Dan McKetch to put flowers on the graves in the small cemetery at the northwest end of the compound. The other graves had wooden crosses, bearing names and dates, but those above his parents read simply, "The father of Artillery Armes" and "The mother of Artillery Armes" and were dated "Christmas Eve, 1787."

It might have been nice to have a mother as Damien had, and Celine, even if she made him work while his father was away. Still, it was pleasant to go and lie in the creek on such a hot day.

The swamp edge was steaming, but farther in, it closed above him, and with the sun shut out, the air felt cooler. He pushed a vine and a death's-head butterfly fluttered off. It was thought bad luck by most of the settlers and the Indians, too, but Doctor Zeke had taught him that such things were foolish, and that bad luck came only from carelessness in the things you tried to do.

A water turkey was perched on a limb above the creek. At sight of Artillery, it dropped down like a plummet and disappeared beneath the surface. Artillery lay flat, his face quite close to the clear, running water, and watched the strange bird walking along on the bottom.

In a deep spot farther upstream, he shed his moccasins and leather breeches, and dived in naked. Silent as a water snake, he came to the top, brushed back his hair, and swam to the other shore. There was a submerged log there that he'd used before. He

stretched full length on it, held on by a knot which rose between his thighs. His eyes and nose were just above the surface. Relaxed and content, he let the warm water of the running stream gently lave him.

He had been there motionless for a couple of minutes when Angela, carrying a bucket, came down to the opposite bank. The talk was that Ruiz Miranda, Angela's father, had been in trouble with the Spanish authorities over fifty head of cattle found in his possession, which were said to have been driven into Florida from Georgia, apparently without the real owner's knowledge. Whatever the cause, Ruiz had arrived in camp about a year before, accompanied by his fifteen-year-old daughter. A Spanish bullet was imbedded deeply in his thigh.

Since their arrival, there had been more talk about Angela than about her father. Angela had been labeled as a troublemaker, and Doctor Zeke persistently referred to her as "that baggage." Since, to Artillery, she had always appeared sweet and attractive, he couldn't imagine why Doctor Zeke spat when he mentioned the girl, and carried so much rancor in his tone.

Artillery watched her, and lay very still. He had grown curious about women, those extraordinary creatures who formed the subject of most of the camp's male conversation. He was also a little annoyed with himself. For years he had bathed naked in the same running stream with children of his own age. Then, a few years before, his swimming companions had been limited to boys. There must be something he had overlooked, some great physical matter of interest, which made the body of an older woman differ radically from that of a little girl, and also from his own.

Angela was humming a Spanish song as she dipped her bucket in the stream. As she leaned above the water, Artillery could see that she wore nothing but a single white shift, and that her skin was smooth and a lovely brown. He felt himself possessed of a strange, new thrill, and equally as the tingling seized him, he knew it must be wrong. Still, he made no move to reveal himself, and finally, what he hoped for happened.

Angela set the full bucket down, pulled the slip above her head, and sought for a limb to hang it on. He drank in a moment of glistening olive nudeness before she plunged into the stream. The tea-colored clearness of the water distorted the lines of her body as she paddled around.

Artillery quit breathing. She was headed straight for him across the stream. As she kept on coming, it was inevitable that his hiding

place would be found. Less than fifteen feet from him she changed her course and headed for a fallen palmetto. It was just a short distance from him, half its branches submerged in the running water, its long, smooth trunk extending to shore, where part of its roots still clung to the ground. There was a chance she might seize the palmetto, pull herself up, and sit down.

Then he saw the snake. It lay coiled tight on the palmetto trunk, with its arrow-shaped head protruding out of its noisome coil. It was hidden, as only a cottonmouth could be hidden, merging its own protective coloring safely into the palmetto's neutral brown.

Angela had already raised her arm when he yelled, "Look out!"

She whirled in a panic, screamed, and sank, splashing wildly. The cottonmouth slithered into the fronded branches. Artillery rolled from his log and dived for the girl, fearing, from the way she was thrashing, that she might drown. They came to the surface together, and he found she was laughing.

"*La,* the young *caballero,*" she said in her liquid Spanish, "lying so still, and so naked and brave, and letting the lady swim all around."

The hot blood surged to his face and temples, and he felt himself speechless. He started downstream to find his breeches, but suddenly she seized him, pulled him close to her naked body under the water, and kissed him. He struggled, but she held him tight. Finally, he was free. He came to the top to swim for shore, and received a hearty slap on the backside.

She was laughing again. "You're a beautiful child, *amigo,* but it is not well to spy on ladies. Once you're a man, you might seek me out. Meantime, we enter into a bond of silence, or else both of us may become the talk of our little town."

He was sullen and dejected as he slipped his breeches and moccasins on. Angela was standing farther down the bank, naked, brazenly watching him. He slunk off homeward through the swamp edge without looking back.

Damien was still hoeing in the garden, and Martone busy with the tobacco. Artillery avoided them both, taking a roundabout route through a thorn patch to the back of the house. He became more dejected as he trudged along. He was ruined forever.

Doctor Zeke kept a cat-o'-nine-tails, which he rarely used, hung on the wall. The old man's eyes would grow hard as bluestones when he heard about Artillery spying on the girl. He'd seize the cat and order Artillery's breeches down. He could stand the pain of the thrashing, but he couldn't stand the sly remarks, Angela's

laughter, and the hollow congratulations which he knew would come from Dan McKetch, who hadn't missed Artillery's interest in Angela the night before. He couldn't be made the talk of the little town.

The dogs came from under the house again, and Artillery passed them without notice. He found a long-sleeved cotton shirt in his wooden clothes chest and put it on. His rifle stood in a corner. He picked it up and sighted along the barrel at an imaginary bear outside of the window.

The rifle was a marvelous gun, made to fit him by Jacques Lemain. The stock was of the smoothest black walnut, imported from the North. The ramrod underneath was brass, as was the hinged cover of the patch-box, built into the butt of the stock. Artillery kept them polished until they shone like gold.

There were few other rifles in the camp. The Charleville muskets, used by McKetch and Buckhart and the rest of the men, were military guns of smooth bore, taken in a raid on a shipment from France which had come into Fernandina.

The lighter fowling pieces, gauged to fire a heavy load of buckshot, were also smooth bore, and designed to be effective against larger birds as well as quail. Artillery's rifle was a thing apart, longer of range than the others—maybe not as deadly—but accurate to a hair. In addition, he had put his heart into every bullet. Even before Artillery was eight, his marksmanship had been used by McKetch to shame many of the poorer shots in camp into improving their aim.

He poured his heart into the rifle now. It was his only friend, for it would protect him in the future when as one of the damned he wandered through the world alone. Flight was the only cleanser, the only penance that could scrub him clean from spying on a woman in immodesty and the taint of a woman's body pressed against his own. Doctor Zeke would understand his desertion and maybe Dan. He had played the savage, dallied with a wanton, and stripped himself of purity. To leave everything his heart held dear and live among the savages forever was the only way a strong man could atone.

Artillery laid his rifle on the cot, and took down his deerskin pouch and brass-tipped powder horn from a wall-shelf, hanging them over his shoulder. He reached in the pouch, selected a bullet, then opened the patch-box in the butt of the rifle and took out, from among many, a small tallow-soaked linen square, which he wrapped around the bullet.

Next, with expert skill, he poured from the powder horn an accurate load of powder into his palm, and let it trickle down the muzzle of his rifle. He stuck the patch-wrapped bullet in the muzzle, pulled the ramrod from its resting place beneath the barrel, and rammed the whole charge home.

The tallow-soaked patch served not only as wadding, but cleaned the barrel as he drove it home. He withdrew the ramrod, and replaced it in its socket beneath the gun.

There was a razor-sharp hunting-knife on the table. He thrust it into his belt. As an afterthought, he went into the back room, where he drank some milk and ate a piece of cold corn bread, then filled a small sack with corn meal from a bin, and hung it at his waistline.

Back in the other room, he picked up his gun and took a last look around. He'd forgotten his tinder lighter. He put the pistol-shaped lighter into his pouch together with a small tin box of tinder, and closed the flap.

The sun was lower in the west. He went dolefully out to the barn, put an arm around Black Cloud's neck, and rubbed her soft muzzle. He would have liked to have taken her, but the sentry at the gate would have never let them pass.

The dogs came out from under the house and were ordered back again.

His life was ruined, but he'd show them all that he was a man, not a child, as Angela had called him. He picked up a small iron kettle as he went through the yard and, gun on shoulder, made his way to the briar patch and turned toward the swamp with a last look back. Black Cloud and the three faithful dogs were watching.

At least there was someone who'd be sorry he was gone.

3

FARTHER DOWN THE STREAM from the bathing pool, a square-ended, very shallow flat-bottom boat was pushed half aground, hidden in a clump of buttonwood and gallberry. A ten-foot push pole, trimmed from a lithe sapling, lay in the bushes beside it. Artillery stood his rifle against a tree, put his pot in the boat, and tugged the boat free. It leaked a bit, and he stood for a moment regarding it with suspicion. The leaks came from the half that had

grown dry on the bank. He decided that in the water the boards would soon swell again and tighten.

His plans, if any, were vague and unformed. All he wanted to do was escape the tongues which would wag about his first amorous adventure, get away from the camp and the wrath of Doctor Buckhart. The swamp had always been his refuge from childhood troubles. In it he could drift downstream forever, safe and unseen. He stripped a piece of bark from a log and used it for a bailer, then carefully laid his rifle in the boat with the muzzle projecting a little over the stern. The push pole was heavy, but it would have to do. Later he could cut a lighter one.

Standing easily in the center of the boat, he placed the pole against the bank and pushed out from shore. The current twisted at the stern, but another thrust against a log straightened the boat quickly and headed it downstream. Shortly after, the creek began to widen, and bonnets lined the banks, their green leaves thick on top of the running water. The cypress trees stretched up higher above him, eighty feet or more.

The world dropped away into a brand new land of silence, and he seemed to be floating in a dream. He had never realized what spring did to the swampland. The banks were walled with a riot of intricate vines, splashed with buds and berries and open flowers, clashing so violently in color that his eyes could do nothing but blend them all together. Now and again he had to move quickly, pushing with vigor to avoid some tree hanging out from the shore so far that it trailed moss into the water. A twelve-foot log on his left came to life, and raised itself on thick, bowed legs. With an angry hiss which broke the silence, an ancient alligator waddled into the stream.

The creek twisted right, doubling back on itself in a hairpin turn. Half a league farther, it twisted left and straightened again. There the foliage was thinner, forming the edge of a bayhead, shining with a solid, vivid, evil green. Birds rose out of it, cawing and squawking—buzzards and jackdaws, grosbeaks and redbirds. A dozen herons, disturbed in their sport of catching frogs, sailed off over the treetops, leaving a single fishing-eagle, afraid of nothing, casting his soaring shadow over the stream.

In his mind, Artillery was marking down landmarks. He had no idea of ever returning, but McKetch had taught him the value of landmarks. The woods and the swamps all looked alike unless you took notice, as the Indians took notice, mentally marking each twisted trunk, each nesting bird, each hanging colony of hornets. A

woodsman always watched the sun, and the lie of the moss, and the texture of soil beneath his feet. When he traveled north, he remembered how far—perhaps unconsciously, but he nevertheless remembered. To retrace his steps, he traveled the same distance south again, checking the known landmarks.

The swamper noticed the stands of ash and willow, oak and tupelo, and the smell of the loblolly flowers, and the dogwood, and the amorpha, and the twelve-foot-high screens of titi, with their stoles so slender and set so close together that the water was always cooler beneath them.

Artillery was aware that the banks had changed. At first, it was one which had grown higher, moving the bordering swampland back a few feet. Now it was both. The water was clearer and running a little more swiftly. Where there had been mud before and knotted roots and sunken logs, he was drifting between two sandy shelves. Thick grass grew along the tops, sometimes intermixed with cane. The bank on his right dropped down again, and he went by a patch of gumbo-limbo. The large, spreading trees, with their shining, varnished, smooth brown bark, cast a sudden cloak of blackness by shutting off the sun.

Soon the candles would be lit in camp, and Amy would be searching him out for supper. She'd have turnip greens that were rich with pork, and a fat spit-roasted trout, and buttermilk, and cakes that were cooked in honey. Maybe he should have left a note. The whole camp would be questioned, and Angela would tell her story.

The other bank was dropping down and becoming flat and sending out millions of thirsty roots to suck up the water. The current grew swifter. He should have stopped when the banks were high, but it was too late now. He didn't want darkness to catch him afloat, but he couldn't work upstream again with nothing but the push pole.

The current slowed without warning, and the boat slid out into a misty, stagnant pool. It was spotted with bonnets and seemed to be dead, except for great patches of dancing gnats that hung above the surface. It smelled of fish. The boat moved sluggishly toward shore, carried by some vagary of the diffusing current. Artillery tried to push away, but his pole sank deep into tenacious mud. The pool was very shallow.

Near the shore, he had seen some fish heads. That meant Indians. He shoved with greater vigor. He wasn't afraid of Indians. The Creeks were friendly. Hadn't the United States signed a

treaty with them in Georgia a couple of years before? And the Seminoles were just the same—Creeks who had broken away from their nation to wander south, seeking an independence of their own. No, he wasn't afraid of Indians of any kind, but the pole kept sticking in the mud, and it made him nervous.

"Hell's lead," he muttered to himself, "I want to get out of this pool."

But the pool had turned to a mystic maze, a circle of dense grown roots and bushes where no water flowed out and none came in. In the center, the boat stopped soddenly, fast aground on a flat of mud less than two inches below the brownish water. Artillery sank the pole for half its length a dozen times before he found himself afloat again. The last three thrusts had been made with panic. Unmoving, the wooden craft had assumed a frightening immobility, as though it might become a part of the stagnant pool, to stay there forever.

There was now no more than an hour of light, and with darkness imminent, the vastness of the country surrounding him began to close in. He turned and looked over his shoulder when the boat was free, but behind him and in front of him everything was the same. Somehow, he'd lost the channel where he'd entered the pool. He picked up a fallen leaf from beneath his feet and tossed it into the water while he held the boat quite still. The leaf drifted slowly toward the bow, then, caught by an eddy, circled and drifted back again. Smoky mist that smelled of rotten wood was rising from the pool. The gnats danced higher over the water.

He could hear a shrill whine in the forests around him, and mosquitoes began to pour in. He shoved the boat toward two big trees which seemed wider spaced than the others. It went between them with just a few inches to spare. He kept on poling, ducking his head under sweeping bushes and trailing vines. Spiked thorns tore at his shoulder, ripping his shirt and bringing blood, but he didn't care.

Suddenly, he was free of the vines, and the sluggish water was moving again. But he wasn't in a river. He was in a sea of slaty water that looked as hard as metal. Great trees rose on every side, and branches thatched above him, entirely shutting out the sky. The current bore him onward, twisting and turning among the trees. He had lost all sense of direction, and every landmark of any kind had disappeared. Each tree was the same as every other, all alike and endless. Overhead, roosting birds came in, settled and were quiet.

He had forgotten his hunger, forgotten the camp, and Angela, and fear of Doctor Buckhart. He had escaped into a lifeless world, a world where everything around him was living, but fleeing from danger, the danger of itself. There, crawling things preyed on life that swam, and walking life preyed on the crawling things, and birds preyed on the life that swam and on each other, and life that climbed and snarled and tore preyed on the birds, robbing their nests in the treetops. And there was just one law that applied to it all: anything human caught in the toils must die.

The current was moving toward an island. It wasn't large, but he could sense its blackness against the water. Its contour, unformed and mysterious, told him that night had come, although out of the swamp there might still have been lingering light in the sky.

He poled to the island, a treacherous thing, thick with waist-high bushes held fast in muck that had caught on roots through the ages and been packed together tightly by the ever-moving push of water heading toward the sea. It trembled when his boat first touched, and trembled when he stepped ashore.

Terror was driving him, for the whole slate sea was steaming now, wrapping him in a fetid haze. He felt that life depended on a fire, a crackling blaze which might repel the stalking death around him. He knew it was there—the wolves, the bear, the painters, the creeping snakes, and the crawling gators.

He wished he'd brought one of the dogs along to give him support and company. A dog, just by its manner, would have shown him that his fears were groundless and that his terror was only of the darkness, just as the blacks and the ignorant children were scared of the death's-head butterfly. Yet the dog might be frightened, too. Its sensitive nose might have wondered of things that its eyes couldn't see—shapes, closing in through the gloom, walking with silent, padded paws on the quaking bog and through the shallow black water.

A small rope was in a ring at the bow of the boat. He made it fast around a root, then stepped back in and got his rifle. He felt safer with his gun in his hand. Still, he had to have light. He couldn't spend endless hours with unknown shapes pressing in on him while he cowered in the boat alone.

At the thought, his fear broke bounds, and suddenly he shouted. He was instantly sorry. The swamp came to life as his cry sped off. Ricocheting against the tree trunks, the only human thing about it was when it came back again, mocking him with a distortion of his loud halloo. Wings fluttered up from the island. Somewhere in the

distance, a painter screamed with a sound of childish agony, almost as human as his own.

He sat flat in the boat, with his rifle held tightly across his knees, and began to cry. Then, disgustedly, he mopped his eyes with clenched-up fists. He was a grown man. If Dan McKetch should ever hear that Artillery Armes had burst into tears at the scream of a painter, how McKetch would scoff and jeer.

A million frogs started to mock him now, opening their derisive chorus quite near him, and passing it swiftly along until the tenor and bass of their clamor welled into an overpowering song. Their croaks went on interminably. He thought of the tiny garden frog barking from Jacques Lemain's rafters. How safe he'd be if he just were there again. The croaking ceased, governed by some uncanny signal. Near the boat, a fish splashed.

In the velvet black of the silence, he pulled back the frizzen on his rifle and poured some powder into the priming pan. The familiar routine and the sound of the metal frizzen lowering into place calmed him for a moment.

His world was a world where a man was safe with a loaded gun in his hand. Near the boat at the edge of the island, something was patting gently. Teeth gnawed on a root, and the patting continued as though tiny paws were dipping up muck and then working conscientiously to roll it into a perfect little ball. Artillery dismissed it as the working of an otter, or the playful investigation of some curious raccoon.

Without any warning, the night was shaken by a hideous, booming bellow. The air became heavy with a mingled odor of musk and fish. Another bellow answered and, like the chorus of frogs, another and another, until Artillery's ears were hurting under the weight of the awful din. He had invaded the innermost sanctuary of the gators. He knew they were all around him in untold thousands, coming to the top to hunt in the darkness, swimming near the surface with eyes and snout just showing, the movement of the giant, scaly bodies leaving scarcely a ripple. Everywhere through the swampland it was mating time, and the bulls were roaring their challenge.

The very island to which the boat was tied was probably the roof of a cave, or many caves, hollowed out beneath the surface. There the gators could hide by day, and in the darkness of night come out to stalk and kill. What animals they seized were crushed and drowned, and dragged beneath the surface into the caverns which served as storehouses for their prey.

Other noises began to cut through the din of the bellowing gators—the raucous squawk of night birds, become panicky with fear; the howl of wolves a long distance away. Artillery laid down his rifle and took his pistol-shaped tinder lighter from the deerskin pouch. Into the muzzle of the lighter he stuffed some of the charred linen tinder, pulled back the frizzen, and poured powder in the pan. The flint on the hammer clicked sharply as it struck against the frizzen. The powder flashed, and an instant later the charred linen was burning with a feeble flame. Except for the bellowing of the gators, the swamp grew still, as though waiting. With the light, the immensity of the distance about him seemed to narrow. The island was close, when a moment before it had been far away. The trailing moss showed up dully, covering everything with its spectral gray. Eyes glinting redly, a bull bat rose, and sailed swiftly over his head.

In the short time while the tinder was burning, Artillery stepped farther ashore. A quick look seemed to indicate that there was nothing dry on the island. Reddish berries gleamed on some of the waist-high bushes, and moisture sparkled from tiny leaves of sickly green. He hastily added more of his precious tinder, and the light flared a little brighter. Not ten feet away, he heard a grunt, and saw the tops of the bushes move. The grunt came again, a vicious unimpassioned warning, mixed with a chilling squeal.

Artillery turned without waiting and jumped for the boat behind him. There was only one animal in Florida that gave that grunt and squeal—the most dangerous killer of them all—the four-tusked boar. He dropped his gun, slashed once at the rope with his hunting-knife, and pushed the boat free. He wasn't more than two yards out when the boar crashed out of the bushes, seeming to move on rollers—a terrible, wild descendant of the swine brought into Florida by the Spanish a century before. In the feeble light of the tinder, its reddish eyes glared malevolently. Blood from some recent kill shone dully on its razor-sharp tusks. Its lips were flecked with foam. The bushes moved to reveal three more of the gray, bristled, humpbacked creatures, the rest of the boar's fierce family.

Artillery was shaken. He had little fear of animals, for he had hunted since he was able to hold a gun, and knew the shyness of most things wild, but he also knew that, singly or in groups, the mammoth hogs attacked anything living, including the diamond-back rattler, and made no exception of man. He had even heard of horsemen being dragged down and rent to pieces.

The tinder burned out, and with its going, the world seemed

blacker than before. At the same time, Artillery developed a friendly feeling toward the bellowing gators, who considered their finest feeding to consist of a nice, fat boar. The wild hogs kept safely away from the water, where they might meet a quick end from the gators' jaws or the lash of a powerful tail.

He fell to figuring how the porkers had made their way onto the island. Perhaps it wasn't an island. There was a chance that in very dry weather the swamp water receded, and that he had touched on a small peninsula, jutting out from drier land. He could tell in the morning. In the meantime, he felt safer afloat than ashore. He had heard from Doctor Zeke that William Bartram, the naturalist, had been attacked in his boat by alligators. He decided there was little choice. Even in the darkness, he'd take his chance with the alligators, rather than the boar.

He stood straight up in the boat, clutching the push pole and listening. The gators lulled for an instant, and during the instant he heard the thrice-repeated cry of a hoot owl.

There was one thing the Seminoles could do better than any white man, and that was imitate the call of birds.

Artillery had seen a Creek warrior stand not a hundred yards from the gates of the compound and call a covey of quail with such an accurate imitation of the bobwhite call that the birds had walked into view from a clump of bushes not ten feet away.

Artillery had learned to use a wooden Seminole turkey call. In addition, while he could imitate many birds himself, he could recognize unerringly the call of most which flew the swamps and piney woods by night and by day.

He knew right now that the hooting owl was a Seminole signal. A long time before, McKetch had taught him how to distinguish the last false note that was always a giveaway. He stood in silence, waiting to hear an answer and remembering the fish heads he'd seen against the bank of the pool. If there were Indians around, they were friendly, for no war party would have left such obvious signs.

The call came again in the same direction, but it wasn't so strong, and somewhere in the middle it seemed to falter. Artillery answered, sending out the penetrating call of the hoot owl loud and strong. He'd find food, at least, in a Seminole camp, and companionship. The Seminoles, he had heard, were very kind to their women and children. Fierce as they were in battle, they would never make war on a single, lonely boy.

These were assurances he gave himself in the darkness, but

deep inside he knew he was sick with fear. He had heard too many times how the Creeks had killed his father and robbed the wagon. Of course, Doctor Zeke had told him there were many good Indians as well as bad, and that the band of Creeks who had killed his father were crazed with whisky and rum.

He had reached an age where life was full of puzzles. McKetch was good, and Doctor Buckhart, and both were white. Yet, neither had any hesitation in raiding a profitable wagon train. He'd heard laughing talk among those in the compound of fighting, murder, and thievery—heard it time and again. He began to wonder how many parents died when the camp turned out to raid a fort or seize a wagon train.

He found he was poling slowly. Once more the cry of the hoot owl came. The swamp began to glow with a misty silver light. Artillery looked up and saw that the branches had thinned and that heavy stars hung low.

The gators were in another lull.

He shouted, and got no answer, but a little later, the owl cry came once, sounding very feeble. It was close, on his left, and came from above. He turned and poled toward it, peering ahead through the silvery glow until he saw the blacker shadow of a slender, heavy-branched tree. Nowhere was there a sign of life or the glow of a Seminole campfire, which somehow he had expected to see. He called again, and getting no answer, repeated the triple hoot of the owl. There was no response, and he felt very foolish. Perhaps he'd been tricked by one of the wisest of birds, luring him on in mockery.

He laid down his pole, filled and flashed his tinder lighter. He was close to a tiny islet, which had formed in a circle about the base of a swamp ash. There was a stirring of leaves up above his head. He looked up quickly, and saw that the boat had drifted almost under the branches of the tree. He thought of a crouching painter, ready to spring, and reached for his rifle. Something moaned and came crashing down not a foot from the boat, showering him with water.

Almost too paralyzed to move, he held the flickering light down close to the edge. Lying half-submerged in the shallow mud and water, not much larger than Artillery himself, was the body of a naked Indian boy. The tinder light burned long enough to show that blood was oozing from an ugly wound in his shoulder. Then the light died out.

Artillery reached out in the darkness, found the boy's shoulders, and using every ounce of strength, managed to pull him in. When

the boy was safe on the bottom of the boat, Artillery bailed as best he could in the darkness, then poled rapidly out from the shore.



THE NIGHT was very long. Artillery kept poling, following the slow-moving course of the water. Somewhere, if he kept following it long enough, it would take him out of the swamp. That was the easiest thing to do, because he didn't know where to go.

The Indian boy in the bottom of the boat hadn't moved, and for a time Artillery thought he was dead. Several times he touched him, placing a hand on his smooth, wet chest. Once or twice he laid his ear close to the boy's mouth to find that he was breathing low. The boat ran into heavy bushes, growing close to the surface of the water. As it scraped along, Artillery could see the outline of a thin point of lower land. He poled the boat up close to it, used his lighter, and stepped ashore.

The point of land was clearer than the island. There were bushes on it and tangled thickets. He waited for awhile, listening, but nothing moved. The sky had grown darker, and the gators had quit, except for an occasional startling roar. He located some twigs on a nearby bush, crackly and dry. Breaking them off, he twisted them into a semblance of a torch. The thin ends caught quickly, and burned with a yellowish flame.

Farther on, he located a fallen and splintered tree. It was soaked and damp, and by working with his knife, he was able to hack loose a piece large enough to serve as a temporary fireboard. He dragged it into the boat and laid it across the gunwales.

Holding his torch of burning twigs, he was able to get a better look at the Indian boy. The Seminole was swarthy, with straight, black hair, a high forehead, and slightly flaring nostrils, indicating some Negro ancestry. He was thin, but supple with finely corded muscles. The ugly wound on his shoulder was still oozing, and blood had caked and matted about it.

Bending closer, Artillery judged that the wound had been made by a musket ball. He had seen many worse on the men in camp. From its appearance, it had happened perhaps the previous day; certainly not many hours before.

He dreaded going much farther inland in search of fuel, but the twigs burned out quickly, and fallen trees were damp near the

Central
water's edge. He'd already learned that the swamp in darkness was not a good place to explore. A decent fire on the boat would help, keeping away the gators as well as surrounding terrors. He lit more twigs, and pushed in a little farther until at last he found some bushes, dry and with wrist-thick boughs. Gratefully and cautiously, he hacked them down.

Dragging them to the water's edge, he soon had a pile of burnable wood stacked in the bow. He tossed in another water-soaked limb, stout enough to support his kettle. With his hunting knife he dug up mud from the shore edge, and smeared it thick on the top of the fireboard lying across the gunwales as he had seen Doctor Zeke do many times while fishing. Kindling-twigs, stacked up on the board, took fire. Cautiously, he added heavier fuel. It burned up brightly, spreading warmth. For the first time he realized he'd been shaking with a continuous chill.

The fire did more. It banished his fear of keeping the boat so close to the shore. He dipped up a kettle of water and drank deeply. The taste was slightly wooden, but otherwise it was sweet and cool. Propping the soaked-through bough against the fireboard, he fashioned a crude hook to hang the kettle on. He took off his linen shirt, made a slit with his hunting-knife, and ripped off a strip. He'd need something to bind the Indian boy and wash his wound when the water got warm.

Outside of the firelight, it had grown darker. The gators had silenced entirely, resting to resume again at dawn. Stars snuffed out above him, and the skies assumed a first faint tinge of gray.

Artillery was very hungry, but it was a long time yet until day. He looked up toward the place where he'd found the dry bushes for fuel, deciding that while he waited he might as well gather more. Two bright lights were shining there, fixed and unmoving, and above them, another weird bush seemed to hang, broad-leafed, twisted, and gray. Silently as a zephyr, a three-pronged buck had stepped into view, hypnotized by the fire.

Artillery lay down without a sound beside the Indian boy. An instant later, his cheek was pressed against the stock of his rifle. The buck stood unmoving, unalarmed by the heavy click of the pulled-back hammer. When the sights were lined between the two small balls of fire, the hammer with its flint snapped down, and the priming flashed. Bushes tore as the deer, struck between the eyes, leaped a yard and crashed to the ground, not twenty-five feet away.

At the sound of the shot, the Indian opened fathomless, dark

eyes and stared first at the kettle, steaming over the fire, then at Artillery.

"Are you feeling all right?" Artillery asked. "You fell out of a tree."

The Indian didn't reply, but his eyes moved back to the kettle on the fire.

Artillery said, "I'm Artillery Armes. I live with Dan McKetch. How'd you get hurt?"

The Indian slowly shook his head and muttered something in the Seminole dialect, ending with, "Me Hasse Micco."

Artillery tried him in Spanish and French and got only the same reply, "Me Hasse Micco."

Artillery dipped the strip of shirt into the kettle, wrung it out slightly, and bathed the wound. It was close to Hasse Micco's shoulder above the bicep of his left arm. Once the blood was washed away, it wasn't as serious as it had looked—a bad gash in the flesh, which must have been very painful. Hasse Micco made no sound while Artillery bound his arm, but his dark eyes hungrily watched the fire and the kettle.

Artillery worked swiftly, anxious to get to his deer. He knew that the smell of blood would quickly draw prowling animals. The best thing to do was to cut off a haunch of the venison, put it in the boat, and push off.

He went ashore, got more twigs and lit them, then took his hunting-knife and started to work. It had always looked easy when he watched the men in the camp dressing down a deer. By the dim light of the burning twigs, he found that singlehanded it was a difficult task for a boy.

He was hacking unskillfully around one of the legs when Hasse Micco appeared beside him like a shadow and, without speaking, took the knife from his hand. It seemed but a minute before the haunch was severed. Artillery carried it to the boat, but the Indian kept on working, rejoining him shortly with another flat chunk of venison.

Artillery pushed off. Hasse Micco, apparently oblivious to the wound in his shoulder, squatted down close to the fire and went to work to make a stew of corn meal and deer. Artillery poled steadily, still without the faintest idea of where he was going. The stew began to simmer and send off a savory odor.

Once, Hasse Micco stood up and peered out beyond the circle of the fire. After a time, he raised his arm and pointed to the right, then squatted down again. Artillery obeyed the direction unques-

tioningly. He was filled with a new security, a warming confidence in the silent competence of the Indian boy. The swamp had become less menacing and the strange and aimless journey seemed to have some direction. Instead of going nowhere, the boat was headed through the blackness toward some goal, some destination wherein lay security.

He was witnessing a type of magic of which he had only heard, the ability of the Seminole to find his way unerringly by night or day in any type of country. Later in life, when he had developed some of it himself, he realized that it was not the unconscious retention of landmarks used by the white man, but an animal sense growing out of a link with savagery.

The boat went into a tunnel of vines so low that Artillery had to stoop. For a while he quit poling, but Hasse Micco motioned him on. Shortly after, they shot out into a narrow stream with a swiftly flowing current. A warm breeze, carrying a smell of flowers, struck against Artillery's face. Overhead, the sky was lightening with the touch of false dawn. The banks of the stream were thickly grown, but the shut-in feeling of the swamp was left behind.

Hasse Micco took the kettle from the fire and held it in the water beside the moving boat to cool. Then, turning around, he set it between him and Artillery, and said, "*Sofkee.*"

Artillery laid the push pole down. The boat stopped its journey, sweeping in gently against the bank. Squatting, he followed Hasse Micco's example, dipping his fingers hungrily into the venison stew. Neither of them stopped until the entire contents of the pot was gone.

Hasse Micco wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and said, "*Haintstohe.*"

"What?" asked Artillery.

Hasse Micco smacked his lips loudly, and his dark face changed enough to give Artillery the idea that he might almost smile. Artillery thought he was talking about the deer and pointed to the haunch in the bottom of the boat. "*Haintstohe*—that?"

Hasse Micco shook his head. "*Echo.*"

Artillery pointed again and said, "Deer—*echo*?"

Hasse Micco nodded. He seemed quite pleased. "*Echohaintstohe.*" Hasse Micco rubbed his stomach and smacked his lips again.

Artillery got the idea that the deer was good, and decided then and there that Seminole would be far more difficult to understand than French or Spanish. Usually there was something in French or Spanish you could tie up with words in English. French-

men and Spaniards used sentences when they talked, but all the Indians Artillery had ever heard just seemed to grunt. Well, he might learn it sometime. He'd apparently mastered an Indian name, Hasse Micco, and how to say, "good deer."

Hasse Micco reached for the push pole, but Artillery seized it first and pointed to the boy's bandaged shoulder.

"Sit down. It's easy enough to take the boat downstream."

Hasse Micco took his place on the bottom with his legs folded beneath him.

The sky grew lighter. The foliage on the bank turned from black to a neutral gray, and after a while began to take form. Mist covered the water. Hasse Micco made a motion toward the right-hand bank. Artillery shoved, and the boat turned in.

The Indian stood up, took the hunting-knife from its place at Artillery's waist, and leaped lightly ashore. He was gone for quite a while and Artillery could hear him moving about through the bushes. When he returned, he had two flat pieces of wood. He motioned Artillery to continue the journey, sat down, and began fashioning the wood into crude paddles.

An hour later, the mist on the water began to redden. The current slacked, as it had the afternoon before when he'd poled into the stagnant pool, lost now and miles away. The water deepened until he could find no bottom to use the pole. It had scarcely missed, plunging in over its ten-foot length, when Hasse Micco turned and handed him one of the paddles, then took the other and knelt in the bow. He dumped the fireboard over. The embers died with a hiss, turned black and floated by Artillery in the stern. He sat down and started to paddle, letting Hasse Micco point the direction from the bow.

Birds flew up raucously. The sky grew pinkish, and Artillery discovered to his great surprise that he was floating on a broad expanse of silent water and that the banks of the stream had vanished. They were paddling over a lake set down in the center of a grass-covered country.

The sun rose higher. He watched a flock of whooping cranes take wing and fly into the distance, following their perfect pattern. Hasse Micco might know where he was going, but Artillery couldn't imagine. The boat was heading westward, away from the rising sun, and there was nothing but water dotted with bonnets, grass, and floating islets as far as his eye could see. A great trout rose and splashed noisily close by. They kept on paddling.

The sun moved higher, burning hot on the back of his neck.

Hasse Micco drove steadily on, his whole brown body swaying in tireless coordination in spite of his wounded arm. Bonnets scraped beneath the boat.

They were leaving the lake to shove into a water-covered prairie. Far away in front showed a ridge of blue, which might have been trees. Otherwise, the rest of the world was missing, turned into a table of inundated flatness where there was no retreat from the blazing sun.

The grass and leaves grew thicker until the paddles were useless. Artillery was stiff and cramped, and far too tired to protest when Hasse Micco stood up and seized the heavy push pole. The boat began to move in an irregular jerky rhythm, scarcely more than a length at a time. The course turned and twisted, but stayed invariably westward. A hundred times Artillery thought the boat was stuck, but unerringly Hasse Micco shoved it sideways, propelled it over a patch of land, almost dry, and somehow forced it through.

Once they wedged between two tussocks, heavy spongy mounds of roots and mud and slime. Hasse Micco stepped out, sank waist-deep, and pushed the boat until it was afloat again. Once Artillery had to get overboard himself to help. Alone, he never could have done it, but there was needed reassurance in Hasse Micco's matter-of-fact air. The soupy prairie clutched at his legs and feet, dragging him down. The only effect of pushing the boat was to shove himself farther under. At last, it moved. He was glad to scramble in quickly, looking like some Old Man of the Sea, dripping grass and slime.

Hasse Micco had filled the kettle from the clear lake water before entering the prairie. Artillery drank sparingly. He was more lost now than he had been in the swamp. There, around each turn there was something new, something unexpected. Here, everything was just the same, limitless as time.

Ahead of the boat Artillery spied an antlered deer standing almost up to his belly in water. It raised its head at the sound of the poling. In that instant, Artillery saw there were probably a hundred more. The buck, acting as sentinel, moved along with the boat, keeping a safe distance away, but never taking alarm. The rest of the herd followed, secure in the knowledge that their leader would keep them safe from harm.

Hasse Micco quit poling. The water had shallowed, and the bottom had changed from gluey mud to a shelf of sandy ground. Hasse Micco stepped out, but didn't sink as he had before. He took Artillery's hunting-knife and began to cut grass and foliage, scattering it lightly over the boat.

Artillery got out and stood beside him. The sand beneath his feet was firm, and the water came up only above his ankles. Hasse Micco worked steadily, and in fifteen minutes the boat was hidden from view under a bed of grass and bonnets and bushes, indistinguishable from any hummock of the prairie.

The herd of deer took fright and went splashing away, seeking higher ground.

Hasse Micco secured the haunch of venison, and slung it over his sound shoulder. He pointed toward the line of blue, a little darker and clearer now, and started off, picking his way on foot across the prairie. Artillery took up his rifle and followed. He regretted leaving the iron pot, which had served him so well, but even the rifle was burdensome in the heat of such a day.

In an hour, he was ready to drop. Hasse Micco set a terrific pace, sometimes walking slowly and cautiously over what appeared to be firm ground. Other times, running swiftly through soggy mud and shallow water, he would reach a deeper spot where he leaped from one treacherous tussock to another with the agility of the fleeing deer.

Artillery could find no sense in his methods, yet, persistently and without a break, they were following some unmarked trail. The worst was when they circled another open lake, grassy-edged, and milky-hued. The mud beside the lake was black and thick. Hasse Micco found the hardest spots unerringly, but Artillery kept bogging and having to be helped out again.

The going was easier when the lake was left behind. It was late afternoon, and they were heading directly into the bright red ball of the dropping sun. The trip had become a terrible struggle, but Artillery's stubbornness had won. He wanted to stretch out quietly on the nearest soft hummock and go to sleep. Hasse Micco had become a baleful, naked will-o'-the-wisp, dancing ahead and luring him onward into weariness. He would vanish in a puff of smoke once Artillery knew himself outdone.

The blue ridge along the horizon grew nearer, distinguishable now as a thick forest of pines, bordering the prairie. They reached it in a tie with the setting sun.

A sandy bank covered deep with reddish needles sloped up sharply. At the foot of the bank was a tiny pond, still and clear and shadowed by the reflection of the towering trees above it. Hasse Micco plunged in. Artillery, too tired even to swim, dropped down by the edge and drank his fill, then washed himself clear of the blackish mud that had caked his body, face, and hair.

They gathered wood and built a fire. Two forked sticks served as rests for a spit while they broiled some meat from the deer.

It had grown dark by the time they had eaten. Hasse Micco beckoned to Artillery. They went through the trees and down another gentle slope. There, a second lake with grassy edges lay unrippled under the starlight. Hasse Micco cupped his hands at his mouth and gave the call of the whippoorwill. On the third time it was answered. He followed it with the hoot of an owl, and that was answered, too. They went back up among the trees and sat beside the fire. Hasse Micco heaped on wood. Soon Artillery was sound asleep, cradled in the soft, sweet-smelling needles.

Sometime later, he awoke with a start, thinking that he was dreaming. Hasse Micco stood on the other side of the fire, but no longer naked, and no longer alone. Ten Seminole warriors, bedecked with beads and feathers, formed a semicircle behind him. Hasse Micco wore a doeskin breechclout, and over his shoulders a cape of beads fell below his chest like a shawl. About his dark hair was a deerskin thong, and sticking straight up from his forehead, a single plume from a white aigrette shone like snow in the firelight, and pointed toward the sky.

5

ARTILLERY WAKENED WITH a ray of sun slanting into his eyes. He followed the beam and saw that it came through a crack in a wall of thatched palmettoes turned light brown from their original green. He was lying on a blanket, and was covered by a doeskin rug which felt very comfortable. In contrast to the broiling heat of the day before, the early morning air was chilly.

Gradually, as he wakened more fully, pictures crept back of the night before—the Seminole warriors standing around the fire; Hasse Micco, no longer a boy, but arrogant in his aigrette plume; a trip across the lake in a narrow war canoe. The remembrance of it brought a sudden sense of shame. He had rested in the powerful arms of a warrior, too tired even to stay awake during the short journey in the canoe.

The smell of smoke was in his nostrils. He turned over, noticing that the palm-leaf wall was made fast to saplings and extended upward into a slanting roof above him. He was in a well-made, three-

sided hut. He burrowed a little farther under the doeskin rug and lay there sleepily, drinking in the view.

Not far from the open side was a larger unwalled shelter. Its thatched roof covered a fire of logs laid end to end in circular fashion like the spokes of a wheel. Suspended above the fire was a tremendous iron kettle, tended by a squaw. Smoke rose, spiraled about the blackened kettle, and struck the palmetto roof above, where it filtered through. Occasionally, a puff of wind stirred the surrounding pine trees, bearing the blue smoke downward and into the hut to make his eyes smart.

The Seminole woman tending the pot was joined by another squaw. The second one looked younger, a comely girl with a straight nose and a clear, olive-red complexion. The younger woman wore a loose skirt and over her shoulders a dozen strands of beads, harmonizing in their many colors. On her back was a small, snug sack, suspended by a broad strap which went across her forehead.

She turned her back, and Artillery found himself stared at by the grave, dark eyes of an Indian baby, hidden except for its serious face. On the young squaw's head was a heavy basket. The older woman lifted it down and began to remove rolled-up balls of fur, about the size of oranges. These she placed in the ashes, patting the embers about them with a long-handled wooden paddle.

Artillery stood in the opening to get a better look. Nearer, he saw the balls of fur were fat, gray squirrels, rolled up and tied. Another basket stood to one side, piled high with sweet potatoes. Oblivious to the baby on her back, the girl went to work picking out potatoes and packing them in the ashes, too.

The roofed-over kitchen stood in the middle of a gigantic square. Palm huts, similar to the one he had slept in, bordered three sides. On the fourth side, green and fresh in the morning sunlight, was a growing field of corn. Skins, serving as doors, hung in front of many of the shelters. More squaws were already at work in the cornfield, leisurely hoeing. Off to his right, among the pine trees, squatted a number of Seminoles, relaxed and waiting for their morning meal.

He stepped outside and looked around, hoping to find Hasse Micco. No one spoke nor paid any attention to him. He had a sudden feeling of being lost and an outcast in this beautiful, strange, and peaceful Indian town.

Sudden shouts from behind him were mixed with a patter of hooves on sandy soil. He walked around the hut, and saw that the village was located on a lakeside. A hundred yards below, at the

foot of the pine-needle slope, a number of Indians were bathing. Close beside them were fifty or more narrow dugout canoes. The noise of the hooves and the shouting came from farther down the lake, where half a dozen Indian horsemen, riding bareback, were herding several hundred head of native cattle in for water.

The cattle were large, with broad horns set close together and sleek hair, and had become very fat on the wild grass of the country. Artillery wondered if they were better beef than some he had tasted in McKetch's stronghold, where the cattle had been fed on the salt marshes near the coast, making the milk almost undrinkable and the beef sharp and disagreeable in flavor.

The cattle entered the lake with a mighty splashing, and Artillery became conscious that his linen shirt was filthy and his leather breeches mud-caked and begrimed. He walked along the shore to some distance from where the Indians were bathing and went in, clothes and all, using the pure white sand of the beach to scrub himself and his apparel until he was passably clean.

When he left and started up the bank, shapes moved in a clump of thick pines, stopping him short. Peering at him from amongst the trees, not more than a yard from the ground, were six horrifying, grotesque faces. He stared in bewilderment, his mouth hung open. The faces were neither bird nor beast, but a combination of both, with tremendous beaks, sunken eyes, and cruel mouths, certainly like no animal he had ever seen.

He began to back away slowly. Suddenly one of the faces fell to the ground, disclosing in its stead the chubby, round face of an Indian girl, no more than four or five, her beady eyes bright with merriment. Artillery laughed at his own confusion, ran quickly forward, and picked up a cunningly hand-wrought mask of bark. The other faces vanished, giving him a quick rear view of six small, naked copper bodies as the children fled, shrieking, up over the hill. He hung the mask on a bush, where it could be easily found.

Back at the square, the smell of food was stronger. More men had gathered, striking-looking figures in their frocks of skin, trimmed at the edges with borders of white. They were taking their places silently, sitting on one side of the square, while the women and children gathered on the other.

Artillery began to appreciate the prank of the Indian children, which up to now was the only sign that anyone knew he was alive. Everyone else ignored him. He had made up his mind to help himself to some of the food as soon as the others started to eat when he spied Hasse Micco. The boy was seated among the warriors, but

rose when he saw Artillery, and came forward, his swarthy face devoid of expression. Artillery had missed him because now he was dressed the same as the others and lacked the striking aigrette plume.

"I'm hungry." Artillery pointed a finger to his mouth. "*Echo*?" He tried out his vocabulary of Seminole.

Hasse Micco made no reply, but beckoned him to an empty palmetto hut, larger than the others, pointing inside and downward. Artillery seated himself on a beautiful bearskin which covered most of the floor.

Hasse Micco vanished. Growing more and more hungry, Artillery watched the squaws outside as they dipped food from the cauldron, took squirrels and potatoes from the ashes, and began to serve each warrior with a gourd and wooden spoon.

A shadow fell across the bearskin. A tall, gaunt Seminole stepped in and took a seat beside Artillery. He said nothing, nor did he look at the boy.

Artillery greeted him politely with, "Your servant, sir," and then, falteringly, tried it in French and Spanish.

On a closer look, the man seemed very old, and his skin was far lighter than any Indian Artillery had seen in the village. His dress was richer, too. A green cloth headdress covered his hair. The bottom, which hung about his neck, was studded with beads in a delicate design. On the left side, a row of eagle feathers surrounded a single aigrette plume, similar to Hasse Micco's. A collar of beads of vermilion and ocher encircled his neck. Under the collar hung a crescent of shining silver. His ears were half-hidden with earrings made from pinkish sea shells. At his waist was a wide, beaded girdle with a pouch in front. A scalping-knife was shoved in his belt on one side and a tomahawk on the other, both with heavily ornamented handles. Covering his feet and legs were knee-length buskins, embroidered, and of the softest leather.

He was scarcely seated when a squaw came in, carrying two hollow gourds of food. The old man took one and began to eat, and Artillery followed, using his heavy wooden spoon. A rolled-up squirrel had been neatly skinned after roasting, and added with a sweet potato to a delicious wild turkey stew. When they were finished, the squaw came back with more. She appeared again with lake water, served in cups made from large, green, rolled-up leaves. When the water was drunk, she collected gourds, cups, and spoons and disappeared.

The old man had neither spoken nor looked at Artillery. He

took the tomahawk from his belt and held it before him, blade down. The upper part of the hatchet was formed of a metal pipe bowl. The old man opened the pouch at his waist, took out tobacco, and stuffed the pipe full. Protruding from the end of the foot-long tomahawk handle was a tiny reed, which served as a mouthpiece.

The squaw materialized, carrying a lighted splinter. The Indian lit his pipe, puffed it placidly a time or two, then handed it to Artillery. The smoke was strong and biting, and Artillery had never tried tobacco before. He coughed and choked and there were tears in his eyes when he passed the tomahawk back again.

"I am Cheti Haiola of Ouithlocko," the Indian stated in perfect English. "I am called by the white men Rising Star. I bid you welcome for my tribe."

Artillery had another spell of coughing, partly from surprise and partly from the enveloping fumes of tobacco. He managed to stammer out, "Your servant, sir."

"And yours," said Cheti Haiola. "I can see that you wonder at my speech. My father was English—a white man. My mother was a Creek, the daughter of a chief even greater than I. So together we marvel at each other, you at my speech, and I at your bearing—that is to say, how a lad so young can so well ape the strength, the bravery, and the bearing of a grown man."

"I don't think I've been very brave, sir," said Artillery.

Cheti Haiola puffed at his pipe. "I have heard many things—a strange tale of a child who hunts the swamps at the darkest hour of midnight, unafraid of Yah-hah—the wolf, of Catsha—the tiger, and the roars of Hulputtamaschay—many alligators. I have heard of a baby who, alone in the dark, answers the hoot of Huppe—the owl. Had one of my warriors done the same at such a time in such a place, I might well have said that he had the heart of Yahchilane—the eagle.

"I have heard a tale of an unformed boy who tended one who was wounded, even though the wounded one be Iste chatte—the red man. From Twelve Mile Swamp, beyond the savanna, these things have come to me, these tales of a boy whose rifle roars as Tenetkay—the thunder, and whose bullet speeds as Hullalay—the wind, to kill Echo—the deer, in the darkness, so that a red man may eat and live again."

Artillery felt that his ears were red. "I'm afraid I didn't do all of that, sir. Did Hasse Micco tell you all those things about me?"

"He is the son of my son," said Cheti Haiola. "I state what I

know, and what I hear from the son of my son are the things that I see. What are you called?"

"Artillery Armes, sir."

"Unlike the names of most white men, it is a name that fits you. I would have chosen Young Eagle had your skin been red, but your name is stronger. I have seen a hundred warriors die from a single burst of artillery."

Cheti Haiola stood up without using his hands, uncoiling with a single flowing motion. He knocked out his pipe against a ridge pole and restored the tomahawk to its place at his belt. "Come," he said. "There are things you must know, and the sun climbs high. Since you act as a man, I shall treat you as one. To understand why I honored you there are things that you must see."

Artillery fell in beside him, dwarfed by Cheti Haiola's height. They strode off into the pinewoods. They were in the trees when, behind them, Hasse Micco appeared with four other warriors. The party stayed at a distance in back, following silently. Shortly, the great square of the village was lost to view. The trees grew taller, filtering sunlight, to leave a blanket of mottled patches spread softly over everything. They passed occasional groups of grazing cattle, and then entered a clearing, sweet with the smell of orange blossoms from a hundred trees.

Cheti Haiola kept on. Beyond the orange grove, they came to higher ground. Palmetto bushes and sharp Spanish bayonets tore at Artillery's naked legs, but soon the bushes gave place to trees in a shady dell. The birds were thick there, splashing the place with red, blue, and scarlet, and mixing with a thousand colors of flowers in bloom. Hasse Micco and the warriors stopped on the edge of the dell.

Cheti Haiola marched on, unspeaking, to stop in front of a mammoth hollow tree. At the base of the tree was a broken gourd and pieces of a wooden spoon. Smashed jars of pottery, the pieces still showing traces of brilliant dyes, lay scattered on the ground. Cheti Haiola stood for a moment staring at the tree, then motioned to Artillery.

The other side was partially open, and an Indian sat inside. He was dressed in clothes as colorful as the many birds and flowers. Silver glinted at his throat, and another white plume, similar to Hasse Micco's and Cheti Haiola's, rose above his hair. He sat with his arms close to his sides, his hands bent up to his shoulders, and his knees pulled up to his chin. He was bound tight in position with twisted strips of cattle hide. Artillery had seen death before, but

the Indian sitting in the tree looked so strong and lifelike that he might have just crawled in.

"I promised you a tale," said Cheti Haiola. "That is my son, the father of Hasse Micco. I brought you here to look on him, for where he ends, the tale I tell you is bound to begin." He raised his hand with the fingers spread and the palm turned down in a kind of reverent gesture. Hasse Micco came forward and stood beside him.

"Hasse Micco speaks English as well as I," said Cheti Haiola, "but we have learned that in silence and ignorance is safety. That is why he made no speech with you who saved him. Some whites mean death to red men, as they meant death to his father, who sits in the tree. It is well to know the speech of white men, for they speak in two tongues, the false and the true. It is life and strength to know when not to use it, when to forget it, and when to begin.

"I have seen our country owned by the Spanish, owned by the English, and now by the Spanish again. And now a new nation has come to life." He turned and pointed toward the north. "They call themselves 'united' by their wish to be free. They ask us to have faith in words. They have fought and died for Washington, Jefferson, Hancock, and Adams, but their words are false, and their freedom is false, and the words I have just repeated are only the names of men."

He turned and raised his hand again and pointed toward the tree. "I know what I see, and I know what is false. Those who are black are bought like cattle, whipped like oxen, and fed and bred like our beasts of the field, so they may multiply to work the earth and plow. So they flee to us for freedom, for there is no freedom in any nation—in this country calling itself 'united,' or England, or France, or Spain—where men own men. And this northern country which calls itself free sends armed bands now to kill my son and capture his son because he is red and partly black, and to seize the ones who have freedom with us and carry them back to the cotton fields again."

Cheti Haiola was silent a minute, his inscrutable eyes watching his dead son's figure as though it might reply. Overhead, birds chattered noisily. Cheti Haiola turned his gaze from the tree to Hasse Micco.

"Let the living speak to the dead," he ordered.

"I speak," said Hasse Micco. "We have many slaves in the village beyond the river—a journey of two suns. They live there as they wish, tending their cattle and growing their corn. They are free to go, but choose to stay. Tallaloko, she who bore me, came

from the village, the wife of Nethlehasse Micco, my father, who sleeps in the tree."

His hand touched his forehead and he continued as though speaking directly. "Seven suns ago, Oh Nethlehasse Micco, we visited the village, you and I. There we saw the raiders come, led by a white called Drummond, seeking our blacks to be sold in Georgia. There they met black men who fought for freedom, and we saw many die. Among those taken was your son, Oh Nethlehasse Micco. He escaped, preferring the darkness of Twelve Mile Swamp to the fields of Georgia. Now he returns to tell you that his knife is long, that life can be only paid by life. Rest easy, Oh Nethlehasse Micco. Drummond, he who killed you, will some day die."

He drew his knife and pricked his wrist, and a drop of blood fell red on a leaf and lay glistening like a ruby under the sun.

"You have spoken well," said Cheti Haiola. "Come." He turned and led the party back to the village square.

Warriors were seated around the fire, row upon row, and behind them ranged the women. The sunshiny square had the silence of death, and Artillery was suddenly frightened. He thought of the graves of his father and mother, and the ringing laugh of Dan McKetch, and the kindly sternness of Doctor Zeke. He wanted to run.

Cheti Haiola strode through the ranks of women and warriors into the center of the square. Somehow, Artillery followed. The chief turned quickly and backed away. Artillery found himself standing near to the fire by the side of Hasse Micco. He tried to keep his head erect and his lips from trembling, when a rattling, strange and ominous, shattered the morning air.

Six frightful figures had burst through the ranks of the warriors. They were naked, save for breechclouts, and their bodies were smeared with streaks of vermilion, ocher, and white. Each wore a crown of eagle feathers fastened around his hair. They began to dance, circling Artillery, the chief, and Hasse Micco. The rattling came from leggings they wore, made of a dozen hollowed-out tortoise shells. The rhythm grew faster as the dancers stamped to their own macabre music. It might have lasted a minute or an hour —Artillery couldn't tell.

Cheti Haiola raised his hand, and the dancers stopped, leaving a silence greater than the cloistered quiet by the hollow tree where the dead chief sat in the sunny dell. Cheti Haiola stepped forward. He held in one hand a tomahawk, and in the other hand an aigrette plume, set in a single deerskin thong.

The tomahawk differed from the one which he carried. The hatchet head was not a pipe, but a solid wedge of burnished steel, like the head of an axe, and edged like a dandy's razor. The handle was shorter, crisscrossed with inlaid metal, which glittered like gold.

Cheti Haiola handed the tomahawk to Artillery, then placed the thong about Artillery's head, and the plume rose high, casting a grotesque shadow. The frightful rattling began again, and a dozen times the dancers circled them slowly. Again, Cheti Haiola raised his hand, and there was silence.

"The cornfields die and wither away," said Cheti Haiola, "and then again they rise in the spring to feed us all. And so all things are once more returned for all things taken away. And gifts to men are given to others when men pass on. The tomahawk you hold in your hand was a gift to Cheti Haiola from an English king. The plume of the bird that you wear on your head is a gift to my tribe by another tribe before me in ages gone. Wearing it, though you fight against us, you can never die in battle, for no warrior lives who will strike against the wearer of the plume of Cheti Haiola. Seven suns ago, Nethlehasse Micco, my son, was taken away. As all things living return like the corn, so my son returns today."

He paused, and placed a hand on Artillery's shoulder. "You are a brother now to him you saved. The plume is yours to wear in honor and battle. The tomahawk is yours to carry for bravery. Guard well the right to wear it every day. You are my son, Young Eagle, whom your people call Artillery."

He turned and spoke swiftly in Seminole. Every warrior sprang to his feet, and the square was shattered with a sudden great yell, "Ai–ayel"

6

ARTILLERY HAD BEEN in Cheti Haiola's village for nearly sixty days. The strangeness and the attendant fear had changed into an acceptance at first, and shortly after into a boyish love of his new routine. Here there were no chores to be performed, no grubbing of the detestable tobacco, and no pondering over French and Spanish and the bones of English history.

The warriors, so menacing when ranked around him in the village square, had begun to assume personalities of their own and

be identifiable by name and conduct. There was Erepah, who had a sense of humor keener than most of the others, and Semethle, a great hunter, and Mithlake, who made the ludicrous little dolls for the children by twisting colored pieces of cloth together, and who carved out tiny wooden alligators and turtles.

Artillery failed to realize that in learning the names of the warriors he was slowly mastering the Seminole dialect, for every name was given a colorful translation by Hasse Micco, whose own name meant Sun King, and whose father, Nethlehasse Micco, had been Moon King. One Seminole was called Powshaila—the dwarf—because he was small. Probably affected somewhat by his stature, Powshaila had become the most skillful artisan in the village at hollowing out a tiny toy canoe, just large enough to accommodate one Seminole boy.

Artillery had tried one one day, but never paddled farther than ten feet from the shore without a ducking. Yet Seminole boys younger than he sent the miniature craft speeding steadily over the water. He had even seen one of the cockleshells carrying two. Hasse Micco was too polite to laugh at Artillery's profane discomfort, but pointed out that sometimes the Seminole babies before they could walk could safely paddle a miniature canoe.

The language began to sound musical instead of guttural as he separated it into words and broke it down. He decided it was a sensible language, too. "Hasse" meant sun, and "Nethle" meant night. Combine them, as they were in the name of Hasse Micco's father, and you had Nethlehasse, or "night sun," which obviously was the moon.

When Artillery had been in the camp a fortnight, he told Cheti Haiola about himself, how his parents had died, and how he had been found, his life at McKetch's, and about his running away, but omitted any mention of Angela. Instead, he blamed it on too much work and too many lessons. Cheti Haiola listened, nodding solemnly and asking no questions. Apparently, the Seminoles never asked questions or indulged in gossip of any kind. So long as you behaved yourself, you were judged by your actions, and your actions consisted of what you wanted to do.

There were many other facts of Seminole life that Artillery was unconsciously soaking in. Violence and temper were lacking among the Indians. Since his arrival, he had never seen a baby slapped, a boy or girl whipped, or even spoken to harshly. Nor were animals mistreated, for horses and cattle were carefully tended, and the

yapping pack of mongrel dogs which slept and scratched all over the square were always fed and never beaten.

Cheti Haiola's village was free of fear as it was free of overwork and drudgery. It was easy to get food in the surrounding woods and lakes, and all food went into the common pot, and there was plenty for everyone. In McKetch's camp, there was an overtone of fear, sentries posted and the cannon ever ready against the Spanish dragoons. The families were constantly talking of close escapes from imprisonment and jail.

Artillery discussed it with Hasse Micco, who showed surprise.

"Here we have no jail because there is nothing to steal. Should one take from another that which can be caught in the net, grown in the field, or shot on the trail?"

"I suppose not," Artillery agreed, "but I never hear any of the warriors quarreling about women either."

"Those who quarrel say their own tongue lies, and that they do not trust themselves," said Hasse Micco. "When I wish to marry, I will send my sister, Chuli, she who carries the baby on her back and prepares the food. She will talk to the mother and the father of the girl I wish to marry. Should they desire me to become of their family, I will send many presents—beads, and clothing, and baskets. Should the presents be kept, we are then betrothed. On that day, I will build our house and plant a crop, and when the harvest is ready, I will go to her, carrying meat from the hunt, and she will come as my wife to take possession. All that I have then is hers, but should I treat her unkindly she can send me out of the house at will."

"But where do you plant?" Artillery asked. "I saw only that single great field of corn and the grove of oranges beyond the pine trees and one large garden."

"Those fields, like our village," said Hasse Micco, "were cleared by us all, but each field and garden is divided into plots for each family, which that family must tend."

"I haven't seen you doing much work," Artillery protested, thinking of his own labor at home.

"I am the son of a chief," said Hasse Micco, "and when older, will counsel on my own. There are four others here who sit in the council with Cheti Haiola. Each family contributes a share of its crop to the families of the chiefs. Such food goes into a general store. A chief must be wise in peace and war, and is entitled to receive pay for his knowledge." He pointed to a wooden house across the square. "Our storehouse is full. It is used to feed the mem-

bers of other tribes who may visit us, or for the feeding of our warriors, should the women decide we must go to war."

"You mean your women decide when you go to war?"

"Do not yours?" Again Hasse Micco's dark eyes expressed surprise. "A man can meet but death in battle, and like my father, he is gone, and when he is gone the woman's toil is doubled forever, and the mourning is hers, and the sorrow. The temper of a warrior is great, and in many things, which talk might cure, he can see a fighting wrong. So the women must decide and weigh. They know better of the life and hardships that must be faced when the warriors are gone."

"Where is your mother now?" It was a question Artillery had avoided asking. He felt that two months as Hasse Micco's brother had drawn him very close and given him the right to know. There seemed a great gulf in some ways between the Indian men and women. They ate and bathed in separate places, and it was difficult to tell who was related. So far as he knew, he'd seen no sign of Hasse Micco's mother.

"She was a Maroon." Hasse Micco was staring straight ahead and had drawn himself tall. "To some whites such as Drummond that means she was a beast of burden. She had gone to visit her sister in our village of blacks with my father and me. She was taken as I was when my father was killed, and she will now be sold into slavery."

Hasse Micco strode away and left Artillery brooding. Doctor Zeke was constantly teaching the children at McKetch's that the history of England and Spain and France and of the newly formed United States proved that in any language men were fools. Artillery, like the other children, had found the words of wisdom dull. Yet they had not been meaningless, for they had left an impression in Artillery's receptive mind. Faced for the first time in his life with the harshness of facts outside of McKetch's sheltered stronghold, his schooling was beginning to flower.

Cheti Haiola, with all the dramatic pomp and ceremony of the Indian, had driven many of the same truths home even better than Doctor Zeke could do. Artillery's father and mother were dead, but it was an abstract loss, a filial sorrow expected of him for decency's sake, and it concerned two people whom he had never known. Strangely, Hasse Micco's sorrow seemed much greater than his own. He had seen Hasse Micco wounded and fleeing through the swamplands. Now he'd learned that Hasse Micco's mother was gone.

It didn't make sense. Hasse Micco looked no different from

Damien, the Spanish boy at McKetch's who played the guitar. Yet Damien had a mother and father, and stood in no fear that some day his mother might be captured and sold into slavery. Yet, Damien's father, like all the men in McKetch's camp, had a fear of his own, that lingering fear of prison. Did everybody live in fear? It was a difficult problem for a boy of twelve. He could reach only one conclusion—that something was terribly wrong.

He forgot it shortly with the resiliency of childhood. He went off into the pines at the edge of the village to practice throwing his tomahawk. The beautiful, well-balanced weapon with its handle of glittering inlay had threatened to displace his rifle in his affections. The two months of steady practice under Hasse Micco's tutelage were molding him into a skillful thrower. Some day he hoped to equal the Indian boy, who could throw with such lightning judgment that he could kill a running rabbit. Artillery had tried it first at trees and stumps and pine cones on the ground. His efforts were clumsy until Hasse Micco had shown him how to follow through with the swing of his arm, and how to grip the handle lightly and correctly. In a month he could sink the bright blade into a pine ten yards distant. In two months, by sheer persistence, he was able to break an occasional pine cone on the ground.

There was lots of time for play. He raced against the Indian children, pressing his fists tight against his chest in a desperate effort to beat them, and was badly outstripped by many much younger. Again Hasse Micco helped him, teaching him how to take his time, use his long legs, and carry his hands easily at his sides. He found he was speedier when he ceased too much trying.

After a while he could hold his own against any child his age in the Indian town, except one. No matter how many started in a foot race, this slender figure in beaded girdle and loose doeskin jacket flashed effortlessly to the fore, to stand at the finish leaning against a tree, breathing easily, dark eyes laughing mockingly as the panting runners straggled in.

"Who is it?" Artillery demanded of Hasse Micco.

"Dauna." Hasse Micco's eyes were twinkling too. "The Light One—a Maroon from the slave village, swifter than a deer, and a skillful wrestler, too. Would you care to try?"

"I'm afraid I'm not very good," said Artillery.

The children were always tussling together, watched by a grave, unexcited group of warriors.

"Come," said Hasse Micco. "Try first with me." He went into a crouch, his arms dangling limply.

Without warning, Artillery dove in, only to find that his friend was composed of the whipcord muscles of a panther. In less than five seconds, his back was flat on the ground. He got up, brushed off the sand, and tried again, with the same result.

The children had formed a watching circle. The third time he found himself facing Dauna. The Maroon was shorter than Artillery and no darker than a sun-tanned white boy. Delicate muscles rippled under the ivory skin. Artillery was smarting from the ease with which Hasse Micco had thrown him, and piqued additionally by Dauna's mocking grin.

He lunged more quickly and more unexpectedly than he had with Hasse Micco, determined in a single rush to annihilate this slender opponent deriding him with taunting grin and twitting eyes. His arms closed crushingly on thin air. A titter ran around the circle, infuriating him still more. Trying to check his headlong speed, he found himself off balance. A slender leg, extended in front of him, tripped him, and aided by an earnest push from the rear, he sprawled out flat.

Before he could move, Dauna was on him, astraddle, with hands clasped in his yellow hair, pushing his face down hard in the soft white sand. He rolled with a heave, as a horse might roll to dismount an unwanted rider. But the rider was swifter. The instant his face turned toward the sky, Dauna jumped him, striking full weight against his shoulders, both hands pinning him there.

Anger surged through him. He knew the rules, knew he was down, but the crowd of children were tittering again, adding to his confusion. He determined that if he couldn't get up, neither could his opponent. He clutched for Dauna, prone on top of him, and caught the neck of the doeskin jacket. It ripped loose with a single tear.

He fell back to the ground as quickly as he had lunged. The ripped-off jacket had revealed two girlish breasts. Mute and miserable, he stayed quite still, horrible comprehension dawning in his stare. The olive face, with its clean-cut lines and its taunting grin, leaned closer. Before he could move, two young lips pressed hard on his own in an instant's kiss. Then Dauna was up, and gone through the trees like some elf of the woods.

Artillery sprang up, rubbing his lips, filled with a quick desire to murder. He started off in mad pursuit, but Hasse Micco stopped him.

"You'll never catch her."

"I'll kill her," Artillery told him. "She kissed me."

"The salute of a sister," said Hasse Micco. "Why should it make you so angry? Her mother, Athena, was taken by Cheti Haiola as a daughter years ago in the same way you have been taken as a son. Dauna is a sister to you as you are a brother to me."

"You can have her," said Artillery. "All she does is make fun of me."

Hasse Micco looked inscrutable. "You're angry because you were thrown. It is not wise to be angry at one with greater skill. Dauna moves with the speed of the female panther, and has the tricks of a woman. I'm not angry, although many times she has outrun, outpaddled, outhunted, and outwrestled me."

"Well, I never heard of Indians kissing," said Artillery.

"She's not a Seminole," Hasse Micco explained. "Her grandmother was a slave who took refuge with us years ago."

"I have little interest," Artillery interrupted, and stalked away. "The only thing I hope is that she keeps away from me."

It was Erepah, the warrior with the sense of humor, who took him out in the woods one day and began to give him wrestling lessons. Artillery never knew, but he thought that the brave was acting under Cheti Haiola's orders. His brightest moment in the camp was the day he threw one of the smaller boys and managed to hold him down.

Dauna, either sensing his anger or warned by Hasse Micco, did stay out of his way. There was no more running or wrestling, yet day by day his irritation against her grew, for every time she passed him with downcast eyes while carrying water or helping the squaws at the fire, he felt conscious of her mockery.

Once, during his lessons with Erepah, when he looked up quickly from a swift hard fall, he was in time to see her head, with its blue-black hair and sculptured features, vanish back of a tree trunk. He flamed anew as her teeth flashed in her impish grin.

In two things he excelled—riding and shooting. The wildest horses seemed to understand him. He could master any of the rangy Indian ponies bareback. The day he hopped on a humped-back steer and stayed ten minutes before being thrown, he knew he had won the respect of Cheti Haiola's tribe. Yet again his triumph was dampened by Dauna's hoydenish grin.

In return, he taught Hasse Micco marksmanship and the quickest ways of loading and firing the precious rifle. He also started him on French and Spanish, naming different objects until Hasse Micco knew a hundred words or more in each language.

Artillery had settled into a pleasant routine by the morning the peddler arrived in the Indian town. Apparently, no messenger had announced his coming, but an hour before his ten Indian ponies, laden with an incredible amount of merchandise, splashed single file through the shallow end of the lake, excitement permeated the air.

He came up the slope toward the pine trees with a shout of "Hello"—a fat little man with twinkling piggish eyes, a bulbous carmine nose, and a wide, thick-lipped mouth, perpetually opened to show bad teeth in a grin. He wore a high-crowned hat with a narrow brim and a high-collared jacket, cut so short that it came nowhere near covering his rotund belly. Despite the tightness of his belt, Artillery wondered from the moment he saw him why his knee breeches didn't slip loose and fall.

His name was Firkin.

He was greeted by a clamor which hurt Artillery's ears. Dogs barked and growled. The usually stolid children shrieked, and there was a yammering from every placid squaw. Firkin swept off his high-crowned hat and bowed elaborately to everyone, then, carrying a cask, he disappeared into the conference hut with Cheti Haiola. Shortly after, the other four chiefs went in.

Hasse Micco explained that the cask contained *taffi*, a fiery distillation of corn. Over cups of it, the chiefs would receive the latest news from other villages. Firkin worked for Panton and Leslie, and was a well-liked trader. Part of his influence was due to the fact that his wife was a Mickasookee squaw. On his periodic visits he brought news of both East and West Florida, and of the doings of famous chiefs and of the younger ones, such as Payne and Bowlegs, Kenhutry, Charlie Emathla, and others who were rapidly rising to fame. Firkin's visits were always welcome as the news was welcome, for he spoke all of the dialects with fluency, knew nearly every tribe in Georgia and Florida, and sooner or later on his travels visited them all.

While Firkin and the chiefs gossiped inside the council house, the Indians set to work unloading his wares from the ponies and spreading them out for display. Artillery watched, marveling at the amount each beast could carry. Heavy straps across one pony's back supported on each side a pendant cask of taffi. Between the casks, three bales of merchandise were piled high and tightly strapped on. On top of the bales was a miniature chicken house. The load made the sturdy pony look top-heavy and ready to fall, but it could easily travel without fatigue twenty-five miles in a day.

When the packs were opened, they revealed a hundred items to delight the heart of warrior and squaw: pots and pans; flints and steel; beads, and ornaments of silver; scalping knives, tomahawks, vermilion and ocher paints; quantities of gunpowder, lead, and musket balls; embroidered buskins and cloths of varied hue. There were medicines, too: sugar of lead, for the dreaded yellow fever; spirits of nitre, and various noxious draughts of purgatives and emetics. Every item was examined with interest, but nothing taken. The trading would come later in the day. Payment for the purchases would be made with cattle, skins, oranges, and corn, delivered punctiliously to the trading posts in the fall.

Firkin departed later in the afternoon, leaving a third of his wares behind him. He also left the village in a greater state of excitement than his arrival had caused in the morning. He had brought news that a party of more than a hundred warriors from another village was arriving that night. Firkin had scarcely departed when a keg of taffi was broached and gourds of the fiery liquid passed around to aid in the preparations for the entertainment of the arriving guests.

A hunting party was dispatched by Cheti Haiola to bring in deer and turkey, and possibly a bear. Artillery found himself, accompanied by Hasse Micco and two squaws carrying baskets, en route to another small lake a mile away. Their orders were to get trout to add to the feast which would start on the arrival of the party and continue until day.

Artillery was worried and nervous, for there was a disturbing tension in the air. It was similar to the excitement he had experienced at McKetch's before the men of the camp rode away.

"Is there trouble brewing?" he asked Hasse Micco, as they trudged along.

"Why should there be trouble?"

"All these warriors coming tonight, and the feast"—he hesitated—"and the taffi drinking. I thought it might mean war."

"It is a battle of a different kind," said Hasse Micco. "The warriors who come tonight will challenge our village to a battle of *tokonhay*, where we play with the ball. Tonight we dance and feast, and tomorrow we play."

"You mean it's a game like I've watched the children playing with those little scoops?" Artillery demanded.

"What the children do is child's play," said Hasse Micco. "What you see tomorrow is a game for men. The ball is larger, and the *tokonhay*, the racket stick which you call a 'scoop,' is very long. You

will see the ball fly with the swiftness of a bird through the air, and sometimes as far."

Artillery was a little disappointed, having keyed himself up to something as exciting as a war. "You mean they play this thing all day?"

"Yes," said Hasse Micco.

"What for?"

"To show that our strength is greater than theirs," Hasse Micco told him. "Also, there are wagers. Only last harvest the village of Chief Kenhutry left here after the game in nakedness, and we were enriched by a hundred cattle, fifteen horses, many clothes, and three score ten of knives and tomahawks. Also, twenty muskets with powder and ball."

Artillery laughed. "Is this the same village that's coming to play?"

"No," said Hasse Micco. "These are the warriors of Kinhaizee of the Mickasookees. Firkin brought news of him. Kinhaizee's warriors, with great bravery, and aided by him who calls himself 'Commander-in-Chief of the Creek Nation,' captured the Spanish fort, San Marcos, not many leagues from here."

Artillery stopped walking so suddenly he was nearly overrun by a following squaw. "Who is this 'Commander-in-Chief of the Creek Nation'?"

"General William Augustus Bowles," said Hasse Micco.

"He's coming here tonight?"

"Of course, with Kinhaizee and others."

Artillery walked on without speaking. He knew inside of him who the others were. They would arrive that night and find him—Dan McKetch and Doctor Zeke and the men from camp. Suddenly, he was glad, for he realized he was homesick. Loafing wasn't quite as much fun as he thought it would be.

He stayed silent while the squaws gathered red berries and dumped them in around the edge of the lake.

Hasse Micco, who was sensitive to Artillery's moods, sat down on the bank beside him. "You're worried because your people come." His remark was half a statement and half a question as he stared out over the water.

"How did you know?"

"Like Cheti Haiola, I know what I see," said Hasse Micco, "and in the short space of two moons I've learned to feel what you feel, too. I've heard my father, Nethlehasse Micco, say that to love a woman is to continue life, and therefore good, because two bodies

become united and thus forever stay. But to love a man is very rare, because men always part. But their love leaves the gods united in spirit, and that is better."

Artillery took off his moccasins and put his feet in the sun-warmed water by the edge of the lake. "I suppose you mean you'd like me to stay, and that Dan and Doctor Zeke will take me back with them when they go."

"Yes," said Hasse Micco simply. "I'd like you to stay." After a minute, he added, "All things have a cause which neither you nor I can change, nor Cheti Haiola. We put berries in the lake, and after a time, because the berries need air to grow, their presence disturbs the waters, and around where they are the fish cannot breathe, and they come to the top and die so that we may eat and live. Watch, and you will see."

Artillery sat watching, dabbling his toes in the water, and after a while the trout began to come to the surface and were picked up by the squaws and loaded into the baskets.

"So you would disturb yourself within and kill something inside of yourself were you to stay here," said Hasse Micco, "for the element of the white man is not among the red."

"I guess I really want to go back," Artillery told him. "But I'd miss you and Cheti Haiola." He could feel his eyes beginning to smart. "Sometimes I think I don't belong anyplace, Hasse Micco. Won't I see you again some day?"

"You will," said Hasse Micco. "Do you not wear the aigrette plume of Cheti Haiola and carry the tomahawk which makes you my brother? Should you need me, I will come, though the distance be a thousand leagues. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," said Artillery.

"Then I have one thing more to say. Everything has a place. Cheti Haiola tells a tale of the bat. It came about before the white man or the red man set foot on these shores. In those times, the animals and the birds played *tokonhay*—which you will see tomorrow—and the animals had challenged the birds to play. The bat was very lonely. He had teeth like the animals, but no animal had wings. He had wings like the birds, but no other bird had teeth. On which side should he play? The four-footed creatures took pity on his loneliness and chose him. Their decision was good, for in the end the bat proved better than them all. The animals won, for the bat could seize the ball in his teeth and fly between the goal posts, having something in him of both bird and beast. So you have something in you of the understanding of both red men and white. The whites

will choose you, and you will find your place by winning for them some day."

7

ARTILLERY HAD BEEN waiting for hours. The sun seemed perversely hesitant to vanish and bring the wanted darkness. For a long time he had sat in his shelter, knees to chin, with his hands interlaced about his shins. Everyone was busy, but in his new status as the son of a chief, it wasn't fitting that he offer to help. When darkness came, rushing on after the short Florida twilight, he left his hut to walk around the square.

A hunting party returned with two fat bucks, picked as one might shoot prime steer from the herd which came at sunset to drink and browse on the prairie. In dignified silence, the hunters tossed their kill at the feet of the squaws working by the fire and left the deer to be skinned and butchered. Announced by the yapping of a dozen dogs, four more hunters appeared with a huge black bear, trussed and hung from a tote-pole. The bear was also left to the care of the squaws, while the hunters repaired to refresh themselves with taffi.

Artillery stood watching the sure cut of the squaws' long knives as they worked on deer and bear. Tiring of that, he went down to the lake, where he stood on the shore and listened. It was very still, except for frogs and noises of the village behind him. The moon came up.

He had never thought until that afternoon that Doctor Zeke and Dan might both be killed. He could never go back to the camp again without them. Maybe he'd become an Indian chief like Cheti Haiola, or McIntosh, or McGillivray, or General Bowles. He'd marry a squaw as pretty as Chuli, Hasse Micco's copper-skinned sister. When he died, they'd put him in a tree, and he'd sit there forever, wearing his golden tomahawk and his beautiful plume.

He remembered then that he'd left those precious articles in the shelter and decided to get them. Doctor Zeke would recognize his importance once he saw him with the tomahawk and the aigrette plume in his hair. He went back up to the lean-to and put them on, and then sat again until the hour grew late, fascinated by the roaring fire which the squaws had built to greet the visitors.

It wasn't McKetch or Doctor Zeke who saw him first. It was Black Storm. Artillery had run out quickly when he heard the shouts and the noise of the horsemen splashing across the ford at the end of the lake. Then, seized with a sudden diffidence, he had stepped into the shelter of one of the huts. General Bowles came first, flanked by McKetch and Buckhart. Dan's black horse turned with a whinny, and headed straight for Artillery's place of shelter as the party rode into the village.

"Keep your path, you cloud of hell!" McKetch jerked at the rein and touched Black Storm with a spur. When the horse kept stubbornly on, he leaned from the saddle and peered in the hut.

The general reined in, watching him. Buckhart, too.

"Are you riding that nag," asked Doctor Zeke, "or is he riding you? What have you found in the hut, Dan—a woman to bed you there?"

" 'Sblood!" said McKetch. "It's letting that Indian taffi boil around in my bowels with too much of the general's rum. Come look, Ezekiel." He pointed into the shadow where the leaping flames from the built-high fire of welcome failed to fall. "May your mother bark at your funeral, if our lad Artillery's not standing shivering in there. Perhaps we're back on the old King's Road and don't know it."

"Do you have to blaspheme, Dan?" Doctor Zeke rode up close, and the general followed.

"It's the lad we left at the camp, all right." Bowles peered down the length of his eagle nose. "Or maybe a ghost, Doctor Buckhart. He carries the tomahawk of a Mickasookee chieftain stuck in his belt, and wears the plume of Cheti Haiola stuck in his hair."

Other men in McKetch's band had gathered around, their horses restless and pawing. They were beginning to laugh and shout rude greetings. Before he answered, Artillery unconsciously looked them over, making a count. Some wore reddened bandages, but none were missing.

Artillery stepped out, standing as straight as possible. "Your servant, sir." He addressed himself to the three.

Doctor Zeke swept off his soft, black hat and held it across his flowing beard, then rolled his blue eyes heavenward. " 'Thy servant,' he says to me, Oh Lord, and since the very night I took him as son, he's done naught but whiten my hair."

"A fitting finish to a century of your trying!" roared Dan McKetch.

A warrior stepped up and said words in Seminole. Black Storm shied.

McKetch reached down and put a hand on Artillery's head, as though to steady himself in the saddle. "The lad looks strong and sturdy for all we find him playing at Indian, Ezekiel. Let things rest at that, and we'll hear more later. The chiefs await us in the council hut."

One of his piercing eyes closed in a wink at Artillery. "I ran away once myself, Ezekiel, to escape too much of the lash and ferule. There's an air about you that makes my buttocks burn against the saddle when you look toward Heaven and start drooling out a hairy prayer."

"Half my task is to train the lad to be unlike you," said Doctor Zeke. "The day will come, when your bones are rotting, that your buttocks won't be burning against the saddle. They'll be roasting in a fire hotter than that which burns out there in the square. 'Tis then I'll turn deaf ear to you, when you scream for the quenching water of my invocations."

"It's rum I'll scream for," said Dan McKetch. "We have news that Cheti Haiola is serving over there."

Artillery watched the three dismount and vanish into the council hut. He wondered if Hasse Micco was sitting in with them. Seeing Doctor Zeke again had made him feel childish. He had the plume of a chief and the tomahawk, but not the years. Would it be one year, or three, or five before they realized he was old enough to take his part in the affairs of men? He was sick and tired of being a little boy. He'd go back to the camp with them, but if Doctor Zeke refused to recognize that he was grown, he might join General Bowles. If the general wouldn't have him, he might join some great Indian chief, such as Payne or Bowlegs, and become a warrior. At any rate, he didn't intend to stay around and study and hoe tobacco. He'd show them all by running away again.

Kinhaizee's warriors were unloading more kegs of taffi from pack mules. Indians and whites were mingled together, forming a wide circle around the fire, and the gourds were passing freely. The tension Artillery had felt in the afternoon grew stronger within him.

A rhythmical rattling started and there was a shout from the men in the square. Two young Indian girls had appeared in the circle. They were fully matured and nearly naked. Each wore a tortoise-shell rattle tied about the right knee and bright-colored ornaments in her hair. The start of their dance was very slow—a

quick movement of the leg and a tiny stamp of the foot that set the stones inside the tortoise-shell rattles whirling. From somewhere out of the darkness a reedy flute took up the beat and started a theme on four weird notes.

Instead of going nearer, Artillery drew farther back in the shadows of his hut to watch. He was embarrassed at the promise of the unknown in the cadence of flute and rattles which silenced the men around the fire and sent a tingling up his spine to touch nettles at the roots of his yellow hair.

Maturity was awakening inside him, rushing through him like sap in a tree, stronger and more potent than when it had started at the sight of Angela and the feel of her body against him two months before. This time he felt he couldn't escape it even by running away, for it had seized the men about the fire and was in the green of the leaf-laden trees and the growing grass, and the call of the night birds, and the bellow of the bull gators in swamp and prairie.

The reedy flute and the skirr of the rattles and the warmth of fire on full copper breasts and smooth, shining flanks were teaching him that life moves on in a never-ending rhythm, and giving him promise of the love and the power of creation that some day soon would be his own.

The tempo of the dance increased and another flageolet was added to the first, producing shrill, harmonious discords, which might have come from the pipes of Pan.

The chiefs and their visitors came from the council hut and took places among the warriors. A full-blood, swarthy Mickasookee in a triple row of eagle feathers which hung down his back, was in the place of honor at Cheti Haiola's right hand. It was Artillery's first view of the great Kinhaizee, the only chief who stayed loyal to Bowles, even when the general's power had been broken by Spain and Bowles had been sent to the dungeons of Morro Castle in Havana to die.

Through all his life Artillery was to marvel at what unseen inner qualities brought the Indian chiefs their powers of leadership. McGillivray and Bowles and McIntosh and Cheti Haiola, and Osceola, whom he met in later years, were educated and partly white, and some, Bowles among them, were fully white and had no Indian blood at all. Kinhaizee, except for his flashing feathers, was unprepossessing, yet leadership and courage and high intelligence were written on his face in a thousand lines, and high pride was in every glance of his steady eye.

Hasse Micco came into the lean-to to stand beside Artillery. There was a movement among Kinhaizee's warriors, and four men appeared, carrying wooden cases which were broken open in front of Cheti Haiola while the dance went on.

"General Bowles brings gifts of muskets, powder, and ball," said Hasse Micco. "Fort San Marcos fell without the loss of a man, although a few of the attackers were wounded. Seven defending the Spanish garrison were killed. Cheti Haiola is troubled."

Artillery turned away from the dancers long enough to ask, "Why?"

"As I told you today, all things have a cause, which neither you nor I can change, nor Cheti Haiola. General Bowles has captured Fort San Marcos, but he errs in his judgment if he thinks he has broken Spain. She has soldiers in Havana and many more across the sea, and more in Pensacola. Cheti Haiola spoke in council. He told the general that when wise men feared the strength of their enemies they might go, bearing gifts of guns and powder and ball, to their friends who would help them."

Artillery turned back to the dancers again. Hasse Micco's words had mixed the enveloping warmth of nature and night and the searing heat of the fire with a chilly touch of fear. Muskets, lead, and ball; the knife in his belt and the golden tomahawk and the rusted cannon; McKetch's and Buckhart's sabers that hung at their saddles. Could he ever escape them? Emblems of death, intermixed with everything since the day he was born.

Cheti Haiola's village was so peaceful, so undisturbed, and so full of fun. The children with their grotesque masks, their toy canoes, the baby boy with his small wooden gator, carved by Mithlake, and the chubby red baby with her ludicrous little doll. It was so full of love and life and friendship, this village. And now guns had come into the midst of it all.

The fire plumed high, searing leaves on the trees far above it and reddening the sky. Did Kinhaizee and Bowles want to spread it, turn it from a fire of warmth to a fire of destruction? Artillery had seen too much land burned over by the cattlemen. Green grass came up in the burned place in springtime, but the grass was the only thing living, for once the fire had passed there, all other life was gone.

More dancers poured in, seemingly animated by some quality in the fire's heat and roar. Or perhaps the heat was from the circulating gourds of fiery taffi and rum. There were men in the dance now, their legs bedecked with rattles, and more women, older and

as naked as those who had started before. The heat was spreading, exciting the warriors into a chant which followed the flutes. It beat against Artillery physically as might sound waves from a throbbing drum.

The squaws took up the rhythm, carrying it in shriller voices. On the edge of the circle one of Cheti Haiola's warriors seized a squaw and disappeared into the darkness of the pinewoods. Other couples followed. One of the dancing women dropped, and her place was taken by another. More taffi passed, and the chanters grew louder until their voices outswelled the reedy flutes and blanketed the fire's roar. Time ceased to exist, as it had in the swamp when he'd been hypnotized by the bellowing gators.

Hasse Micco left him, and returned with food—potatoes cooked in the clear, drawn bear fat; venison, fowl, and small round cakes of corn meal steeped in honey. Artillery found he couldn't eat. His arms and legs were trembling, and his face was flushed with fever. Hasse Micco left again, and Artillery found a blanket and lay down, propped on elbows, chin in hands. After a while he fell asleep and dreamed, lulled by the endless roar.

When he awoke, it was dawn, and the dancing had stopped. Some of the warriors were still eating and drinking. Most of them were stretched out flat and sleeping soundly, sending up from the village square the chorus of a giant snore.

In the dawn before sunrise the village was a peaceful gray. The fire had died down and was sending up a thin spiral of smoke which lost itself immediately in the moss-draped trees. Even the sleeping braves and their feathers looked gray. The neutral coloring soothed Artillery and cooled his hectic feeling of a few hours before.

He walked down to the lakeside feeling himself comfortably wrapped in a great immensity. Under an impulse, he stripped and waded out into the clear, unrippled water, and swam for a while. Dressed again, he took a large canoe, paddled out from shore, and sat there to wait for the first red rays to proclaim the coming of day.

The lake changed hue. It happened so gradually that Artillery was scarcely aware of the lightening of the surface, the smooth, quiet merging of one dark shade into another, as though some unseen hand had rolled back a carpet to reveal another of softer shade. The gray changed to pink. The pink grew deeper, drove off the gray, and suddenly the sky was bright with the rising sun.

The world and the village came to life with a startling roar. One instant the shore line was deserted. The next, Kinhaizee's more than a hundred warriors had burst from the shelter of the

trees and were charging along the bank toward the sleeping village. The woods and lake echoed with their intimidating war cry, so loud and fierce that the branches of the pine trees seemed to bend before its power.

Artillery sat stunned, clutching his paddle, picturing slaughter and treachery. Kinhaizee's men were smeared with battle paint from head to toe. An attack so unexpected must destroy Cheti Haiola's village before it could awake or move. Not a shot would be fired by the drunken warriors, feasting and snoring in the square.

Artillery's stomach revolted at his own helplessness. McKetch might die, and Bowles, and Buckhart, and Hasse Micco. He could only sit by, stupidly watching from his point of vantage in the canoe. Cheti Haiola had been tricked. Kinhaizee's braves had come prepared for murder, not to play a game of ball. His heart turned over inside him.

From farther down the shore, an answering yell shattered the woods to meet Kinhaizee's challenge. From the shelter of the pines a single figure burst forth and stood for a second, motionless on the lake bank. It was Cheti Haiola, unmistakable in his headdress of green and his aigrette plume. He raised his hand, and the trees behind him vomited painted Seminoles until double the number of Kinhaizee's braves stood packed behind their leader, ready to meet the onslaught on the shore.

The two groups charged and met, brandishing war clubs and shouting invective. But there was no battle. The warriors merged, shouted still louder, and broke again, rolling back into their own thick ranks as waves tossed off from shore.

Artillery paddled closer. The sun was a little higher, and he could see that what he had thought were war clubs were really two very large ball-sticks held together, similar to those the children used in play. The sticks were flattened out to form a spoon receptacle at one end and were nearly three feet long. The bottom of each receptacle was laced with crisscrossed thongs.

The harsh yelling turned into savage war chants. Both parties disappeared into the woods, going toward the village.

Artillery paddled ashore and approached the village square with caution, still a little unnerved by the clash of the warriors. Rattles started. When he reached the square, it was to find more feasting and dancing going on. He joined Doctor Buckhart, Bowles, and McKetch, who were seated with Cheti Haiola and Hasse Micco on the other side of the square.

"The prodigal son." Doctor Zeke disposed of a knuckle of

venison he was munching on, and wiped his beard with the back of his hand. "No sooner do we find you, lad, than you're gone again."

"I went down to the lake early, sir, to swim. Then I heard all the warriors shouting and thought there was going to be a war."

"Everything in life is a war," said Cheti Haiola. "When men struggle to the death, they call it battle. When they struggle for a woman, then it is love. When they struggle to earn a wager, then it is play."

McKetch took a swig of taffi and passed the gourd to Doctor Zeke, who drank too. "You've done a deal of boating, poling, traveling, and saving, lad, since we've been gone." His eyes were bright. "What say you? Cheti Haiola, our friend, says he's given you a brother. He wants the lad, Hasse Micco, to return to the compound with us when we leave here at the end of day."

"Hasse Micco—going back with us?" Artillery's voice was full of joy.

Buckhart said, "Aye. There are wiser men than Dan who appreciate the teaching I've given you, Artillery. It's Cheti Haiola's desire that Hasse Micco master Spanish and French, and know something of the English classics and history. He's to stay with us through the summer, at least, and perhaps for longer, should he wish. In return, he'll teach you Seminole and something of the Indian method of hunting and fishing, and tracking and trapping."

"And throwing the tomahawk?" Artillery asked.

"Sink me," said Bowles. "There's a soldier for you who recognizes that the hatchet's more powerful than learning."

"My tomahawk is both pipe and blade," said Cheti Haiola, and took the weapon from his belt. "The knowledge of when to smoke it in friendship and reflection is far more important than the skill to throw it and split men's heads in war. That is the knowledge I would have Doctor Buckhart impart to the son of my son. It is good."

"Aye," said Buckhart. "I may also teach him to pray."

Artillery looked thoughtful. "I'm glad, sir. But I have no horse, and Hasse Micco hid the boat someplace across the prairie."

"Hell's molten lead! It's the boat he thinks of. There's a lad, Bowles, who'll make his name in Panton and Leslie's counting-house some day."

A shout went up from Kinhaizee's braves across the square. Everyone stood up.

Hasse Micco came close and said to Artillery, "I am glad, too.

We each can learn many things from the other. Come. We go to the playing field to watch the *tokonhay.*"

8

THE OPEN SPACE where *tokonhay* was played was about a quarter of a mile from the village. Artillery had noticed it many times, but never known its exact use before. It was a great clearing where trees had been cut down, stumps uprooted, and the sandy soil leveled. In the center, laid out due north and south, was the playing field, marked by stakes into a quadrangle ninety yards wide by a hundred and fifty long. Two tall poles, six feet apart, formed goals at each end.

Hasse Micco explained to Artillery that the object of the game was to drive the ball between the opponent's goal posts. Each goal counted one. Twenty points was the game.

The clearing was deserted when they arrived, but soon began to fill with squaws carrying gourds and food, pots of water, and casks of taffi. Artillery spotted the annoying Dauna watching him from a clump of trees, and hurriedly moved away. Cheti Haiola, his chiefs, and the party from McKetch's found a place of vantage on the sidelines midway between the goal posts. They were joined shortly by Chief Kinhaizee and three subchiefs of the Mickasookees. Taffi was instantly served by a squaw.

Hasse Micco sat beside Artillery and showed him a ball. It was buckskin, about three inches in diameter, and of two colors. The cuplike halves had been filled with Spanish moss and tightly sewn together with a deerskin thong.

Older men from the village straggled in, and more of Kinhaizee's warriors, but there was still no sign of the players. Children squirmed through the watchers to find a place near the edge of the field. Many of the younger squaws carried babies on their backs. Watching them, Artillery was impressed with the fact that during his stay in the village he couldn't remember ever having heard a papoose cry. Apparently, the babies found something soothing and cradlelike in the smooth, even walk of their mothers. In back of him, one young squaw, tiring of her burden, had hung her carrying-sack on the limb of a large tree. The papoose stayed there quietly, staring out with interest at everyone who went by.

From some distance away, in the woods at the north end of

the field, came a shout. It turned into a rhythmical war chant, and was answered instantly from the south.

McKetch said, "They're coming."

The chanting grew nearer to each end of the field, and the painted warriors Artillery had seen earlier in the morning came out of the trees in double file—the Mickasookees from the north, the Seminoles from the south—brandishing their rackets.

"Sink me," said Bowles. "It's a better show than anything I've seen in England. Eighty of the strongest to a side, no less! I like the looks of Kinhaizee's men. A sovereign, McKetch, that they score the first."

"Done," said McKetch. "And another with you, Kinhaizee."

The grave chief nodded acceptance.

McKetch snapped his fingers. "What say you, Ezekiel? Do you favor Kinhaizee or Cheti Haiola?"

Doctor Buckhart studied the chanting warriors. "Your men are the larger, Chief Kinhaizee, and wear more paint. But Cheti Haiola's are the younger, and to my old eyes, muscled like painters." He reached into the pocket of his broadcloth coat and took out a buckskin purse. "McKetch is one who parts with a sovereign as he might an eye. Should you fancy the power of your braves, Kinhaizee, I have ten golden sovereigns that say they'll leave defeated at the end of play."

Kinhaizee nodded, and turned his wrinkled face toward the Seminole chief.

Cheti Haiola calmly filled his tomahawk-pipe and lit it. "I have ten more, my friend, that says each inch of Doctor Buckhart's pure white beard denotes a pound of wisdom."

Kinhaizee nodded.

"'Sblood, Doctor Zeke!" McKetch stared at the purse that Buckhart was holding. "You play with sovereigns as though they were buttons." He clapped a hand to the pocket of his bright blue coat. "Hell's lead, man! Is that yours or mine? I'm missing something."

"It's yours," said Buckhart calmly. "I removed it last night while you were in a drunken stupor. We share and share alike as always. I had a mind that, caught in your alcoholic vapors this morning, your judgment would be more faulty than usual. We'll balance our winnings and losings at the end of the day."

"Hear ye now, William!" McKetch exploded to Bowles. "Were the Spanish to catch him and shave him they'd find a snatch-purse behind that field of cotton. Not satisfied with ruining himself in

England at an early age, he grows old on my bounty, and steals my gold for pay. I've four more sovereigns—or he has—to add to the one that says Cheti Haiola's warriors will score the first."

"Done," said Bowles, his white teeth flashing.

The warriors were close together in the center of the field. The chanting ceased, and brought a heavy hush to the watchers. A hundred and sixty players were spreading out, facing each other, man to man, in an orderly array. The sun had crept up over the treetops to cast their shadows black against the stubbly, sandy soil. Two of the tallest warriors stood face to face in the center. Their arms, extended by the rackets they were holding, looked eight feet long.

Artillery held his breath.

Powshaila, the dwarf, had taken a ball from Cheti Haiola and run out on the field. When he was near the two, he suddenly tossed the ball high in the air and scurried back to his place on the sidelines.

Kinhaizee's warrior caught it. His left-hand racket swung in an arc, and the ball zoomed low and sideways, to be cupped by one of his fellow players. The man began to run toward the Seminole goal posts. Three of the Seminoles converged upon him in utter silence, but with wildcat fierceness. His racket whirled, and over their heads the ball made an arc of sixty yards. It was caught by Mithlake, whom Artillery knew.

In turn, instead of throwing, Mithlake started to run it back. A Mickasookee charged him head on. He dodged like a frightened deer. Six more Seminoles took up speed with him. Two Mickasookees were knocked quite flat.

A yell of "Ai—aye" burst from the Seminole watchers. It looked as though Mithlake was in the clear. The opposing Mickasookees saw it, too, and swiftly drew close together down the field to form a wall. Knowing he couldn't pass it, without losing a stride of his running, Mithlake whirled and threw.

A Mickasookee smashed hard into the Seminole player waiting to take the pass. The man went down, and the Mickasookee caught the ball. Almost with the motion of catching, he threw. Then, for a time things moved so fast that Artillery lost track. Warriors met, dodged, whirled, and danced away. Artillery would follow a speeding figure, only to find that a hundred yards farther down the field another had thrown the ball. Sometimes it was buried in a writhing mass of players. Once, a Seminole had a clear shot to the Mickasookee goal posts. Before he could even raise his arm, he was

struck from behind by a yelling opponent so hard that he turned a somersault. The ball was scooped from the ground by the man who hit him and sent on a flight to safety.

The Mickasookees changed their tactics. Instead of running, they held steady in an intricate design and kept on passing. Their racket work was faster than the eye could see. The Seminoles were charging madly, but always too late to stop the tiny, soaring speck getting nearer to their goal posts. Mithlake threw himself bodily against Kinhaizee's largest warrior, and found too late that another had the ball and stood entirely free. Unhampered, the man swung his stick accurately and leisurely. The ball skimmed through the towering posts to score a goal.

Bowles jumped to his feet, waving his arms. "Pay, McKetch! Pay me. That's five good quid you owe to me, and another to Kinhaizee."

"Pay them, Ezekiel, and charge it to your own foul share," said McKetch. "It's you who forced me into that bet by taunting me."

Doctor Buckhart passed five of the sovereigns to General Bowles and another to the silent chief. "I'll lay ten now, Bowles, that the Seminoles beat you—if you'll give me odds."

"Odds?" yelled Bowles. "Demmit, Doctor, you'll be the death of me."

"Eleven pounds to ten," said Buckhart unhurriedly. "Your Mickasookees are a point up."

"Done," said Bowles.

"I'll take the same," said Dan McKetch.

"Done," said Bowles.

"I'm glad to see, Dan," said Buckhart, "that you've taken some lessons in wagering from me."

McKetch's reply was buried by a savage scream from the Seminoles. The ball was in play a second time, and Mithlake had caught it. This time the fleet-footed Seminole was running in the open, except for a single Mickasookee warrior between him and the goal.

The Mickasookee was very tall. Instead of moving forward to intercept the speeding Mithlake, he held his place slightly in advance of the goal posts. He was there when Mithlake shot. The Mickasookee crouched, straightened like an uncoiling spring, and suddenly seemed to soar. A blood-curdling yell came from the throats of Kinhaizee's men as he went up and up and snared the flying ball.

"Pour out more gold, Doctor Buckhart," said General Bowles. "Let's see what you have there, man. With play like that, I'm ready to take it all."

"At eleven to ten?"

Bowles hesitated. "You drive a hard bargain, but it's done."

"Say a hundred then," said Doctor Zeke. He arranged ten piles of ten sovereigns each in a neat row on the ground. "Half for me, and half for Dan. If Kinhaizee's men lose, you pay a hundred and ten."

"It's gold you'll never see," said Bowles, "for my wager is as good as won. What say you, Cheti Haiola? I'll make the same with you."

Cheti Haiola emitted a cloud of smoke and shook his head.

"Sink me," said Bowles. "You see, McKetch? He doesn't trust his warriors' skill. I repeat, my wager is as good as won."

Cheti Haiola turned and spoke in dialect to Chief Kinhaizee. Kinhaizee's face became more wrinkled, and he uttered something gutturally to the three subchiefs who sat with him. They grunted a reply, and Kinhaizee nodded.

"No man lives, General Bowles," said Cheti Haiola, "who can say to himself at nightfall that he will once more see the rising sun. Yet I trust the skill of my warriors as I trust the coming of dawn. Kinhaizee has need of furs for trading. He has wagered me twenty muskets with powder and ball. Should my warriors lose, I will pay him with twenty separate piles of furs, each stacked the height of a gun."

The Mickasookees scored again, and three times more in the next two hours. McKetch's mustache was drooping, seemingly wilting under the heat of the climbing sun. Artillery found his spirits dropping with Dan's mustache. Bowles was jubilant, up on his feet, boasting loudly, seeking more wagers as he strode up and down.

Instead of tiring, the players grew fiercer. Squaws ran out on the field with gourds of water, occasionally dashing a full one in the face of some contestant who had been knocked down.

Only Buckhart, Kinhaizee, and Cheti Haiola appeared unaffected when at noon the score for the Mickasookees stood at seven, and for the Seminoles, one.

"The odds you're offering are paltry, general." Doctor Zeke serenely arranged his beard across his knees and stared mildly at the gesticulating Bowles. "You've milked us of all our gold right now, should we chance to lose. But we have many fat steers grazing about the compound, a day's ride from here. Should we say they're

worth a pound a head? Or five dollars, American money, whichever you like. What say you, Dan? Shall we wager him twenty?"

Bowles said quickly, "Done!"

"Hell's lead!" yelled McKetch. "You're passing free with our cattle, Ezekiel."

"And you with your oaths," said Doctor Zeke. "Hold till I finish. The odds at this stage would indicate ten to one."

"To be scalped by a white man is something new," said the general. "Yet I'm rich from this morning of gaming, and not paltry like the Spanish. Your wager's taken, Doctor Buckhart. A thousand American dollars against twenty head of your straggly steer. I say, 'Done.'"

"And I say it's we who are done!" McKetch exclaimed. "Another hour and that prickly tomnoddy will have wagered off every wench in my compound. And our slaves to boot."

"You'd live to thank me," said Doctor Zeke. "'Twould be a better day for your soul were you put in a stockade with naught around you but female cattle, though you'd probably have half of them calved before a second moon."

Cheti Haiola spoke to Kinhaizee, and again the Mickasookee chieftains went into conference, this time taking a little longer. Finally, Kinhaizee nodded.

"I draw on your faith in my warriors," Cheti Haiola told Buckhart, "for by faith, men win. This time Kinhaizee has wagered more muskets, lead, and powder against our cattle and our horses, which his tribe is lacking. He has given the odds which the general has given. For a horse or a cow, ten muskets to one."

"'Tis well you thought not of Black Storm and Savanna, thistlebush," said Dan McKetch, "or we'd have walked to the camp on bleeding feet. 'Sblood!" He sprang to his feet. "Look at yon Seminole run!"

It was Mithlake again, sprinting swiftly, with the field trailing after him. This time he made no attempt to shoot, but bore straight down on the towering goalkeeper, who watched for a moment and then ran forward to meet him.

Artillery bounced to his feet as well, and began to jump up and down beside McKetch. The ball shot in from another direction, hurled by a lithe young Seminole whom no one had noticed. It went true through the posts, scoring the second goal for the Seminoles. For Artillery, it was not until then that the game had really begun.

With the scoring of the second goal, the Seminole players ignited like dry grass, with a fiery spirit that crept from man to man

until it was blazing throughout the entire eighty warriors. They had fought hard, run fast, and played with accuracy all morning, but Artillery had felt that his friends were losing. Suddenly, his feeling changed, too, as though some of the Seminoles' new-found confidence was passed on to him. In spite of the score, he felt serene and secure, confident from the atmosphere, if from nothing else, that he was backing a practically unbeatable team.

The Seminoles scored again, and without much effort. After that, the contest might have been friendly, but Artillery sensed in it something more than friendliness, a grim determination on the part of both sides to conquer, which had a murderous undertone to it, approaching the seriousness of an actual war.

The score stood tied at eleven to eleven by the middle of the afternoon. The playing remained orderly, as it had before, but now when a player was struck by a flying wedge of half a dozen opponents, instead of springing to his feet, he often stayed down. The game went on, swirling about him, while he was ministered to by some water-carrying squaw.

From then on, Doctor Zeke's judgment proved good, and the stamina of the younger Seminoles began to tell. It was McKetch who was on his feet now, and Bowles who had quieted. Dan had reached a state so frenzied that he felt he was helping by rushing up and down the edge of the field, swearing wholeheartedly at the contestants.

Even Doctor Zeke was not unimpressed, as he finger-combed his beard with more than his usual contemplative fervor. The general's betting was over for the day. Doctor Zeke's last attempt to garner some more of the general's successful looting for himself and McKetch had been summarily refused with a couple of doleful "Sink me!" 's

None of the chiefs showed any excitement, unless it was to nod phlegmatically at the course of play.

Hasse Micco moved up to take a seat beside Artillery, who told him, "I thought we were going to lose."

"We seldom lose," said Hasse Micco.

"Well, it didn't start out very well."

There was a hint of laughter in Hasse Micco's deep eyes as he turned to look at Artillery. "Wagers are made on the end of *tokonhay*, not on the beginning. Perhaps Cheti Haiola directed that our players be not too strong in the morning. Battles are won in such a manner, when an enemy is led to underestimate the strength of its foe."

"Is Cheti Haiola still betting?" Artillery was watching the chiefs, who were talking together.

Hasse Micco said, "It is Kinhaizee who is making the wagers now. He is very angry. It is Cheti Haiola who accepts them. You may yet see the braves of Kinhaizee leave here naked, as Kenhutry's village left here the last time we had *tokonhay.*"

On the field, the Mickasookees were yelling louder, and charging more fiercely, tactics which the fleeter Seminoles found to their liking. They had settled into an astonishing exhibition of cross technique—run and shoot, shoot and run—and then cause the ball to vanish. They scored twice more and the Mickasookees' tempers flamed still higher. From then on it was the Seminoles who had the ball most of the time, and who carried all of the play.

There was a single spurt which scored two more goals for the Mickasookees, when they rushed the ball close to the goal posts by sheer violent tactics and weight of numbers, but it came too late. The sun was dropping, and Cheti Haiola's Seminoles had already scored nineteen. The fleet Mithlake shot the final goal just before sundown, winning twenty to thirteen.

A yell went up that frightened a thousand nesting doves from the treetops.

"Sink me!" said Bowles.

Doctor Buckhart stood up and rubbed his legs. "You're already sunk, general. I have but one worry. Do you have the gold to pay?"

"He has a horse," said Dan McKetch. "Take it, Ezekiel. William makes a fine, stalwart figure walking. 'Sblood! It's but twenty days afoot from here back to San Marcos, where he can scuttle another Spanish ship."

"I wager not what I have not," said Bowles, and tossed a second buckskin purse to Buckhart. "Count out what's yours, Doctor Zeke, and return the rest. And then, to the village. There's to be more dancing and feasting, but when all are assembled, and before the taffi passes around, I have words to say." He beckoned, and strode off through the pine trees, followed by Kinhaizee and the subchiefs of the Mickasookees.

The fire was burning high again when Artillery reached the square. General Bowles was indeed an actor, for he had already selected the most commanding position, a spot where the fire mingled with twilight to strike full into watching faces, and where his own tall, commanding figure was silhouetted as a powerful predominating shadow.

The Seminoles were in a jovial mood, but Kinhaizee's warriors

filed in and took their places standing in sullen silence. Their war paint, colorful during the sunny day, began to glitter ominously as the twilight faded and night closed in. Kinhaizee and Cheti Haiola came up front through crowded ranks, and squatted on the ground, facing Bowles, with their subchiefs about them. Buckhart and Dan McKetch and his men had formed a small, unobtrusive bloc farther to the rear.

It might have been the sullenness of the Mickasookees that made Artillery feel something was wrong. He looked over the assembled crowd, instantly noting that the majority of the Seminoles assembled around the fire were squaws. None of Cheti Haiola's victorious players were in sight. Artillery sat silent, wondering where they had gone.

Bowles waited a moment, then raised his hand. A silence fell, broken only by the crackling fire and the busy, repetitious call of a persistent whippoorwill.

"My message is short. Chief Kinhaizee and his warriors already know it, so I speak in English for the benefit of the white men here who so bravely aided me in taking Fort San Marcos. The great chief, Cheti Haiola, will understand me. When I am finished, he will do me the honor to translate my message and thus pass it on.

"I come to be a friend among many enemies. This is your land and your country, the country of the red man. Already, boundaries are being measured by the engineers of America and Spain, so that it may be divided up and taken away from you. I warn you of Colonel Hawkins, an American. He is your enemy—a dangerous man. He has written me that it is the plan of the American government to introduce the wheel, the loom, and the plough. He will teach you how to farm and how to live, but he says not where you will live, and neither does Spain. One of your leaders, who killed an American engineer, was punished by the Creeks to the north, who are friendly with Spain. Hear how it was done.

"It is the way of the red people when they punish to do it with sticks, and then send the sticks to those interested in the punishment. The Indian leader's house was pulled down and burned. He was beaten with sticks until dead. His ears were cut off, and part of his cheek. All his fowl and hogs were killed. His pots, pans, spoons, and the furniture of his house were broken. And the stick which killed him was delivered to other leaders of the Seminoles and the Mickasookees as a warning."

He paused.

"It was delivered to Chief Kinhaizee, too," he continued more

quietly. "But Chief Kinhaizee has been warned and insulted before, and he is not afraid. Chief Kinhaizee made a statement concerning Fort San Marcos two moons ago: 'When I enter that fort again, it will be as a conqueror.' He entered it as a conqueror, but not with the aid of the United States or Spain. He was aided by me and by England, who is ready now to offer her aid to you."

Again he paused, searching the faces of the listening chiefs for some expression. "For thirty years you lived happily under England, and your people prospered. All red men should be happy at *Boos-ke-tah,* the festival of the corn, but for many feasts there has been no happiness for the red man under Spain. Americans raid your slaves unhindered and steal your cattle. Only England holds back the French from landing on these shores to spread death and destruction.

"Now England sends you gifts of muskets, powder, and ball, of taffi to drink, of food to eat, and of clothes you may wear. She sends these gifts through me, Director General of the Muscogees and of the whole Creek Nation. With these gifts, the English king sends to you, his friends, this message: With your help, England can rule here once again. The English king has appointed me your servant, King of Florida from this day. Kinhaizee already serves me. Cheti Haiola must answer for his people. What does he say?"

Cheti Haiola rose slowly, folded his arms across his chest, and stood facing the general. "Your voice rings with truth, but your words are false," he told him calmly. "I and my people serve neither self-crowned kings nor lying leaders, who would stir us into the chants of war." He stopped.

"England sends you gifts!" Bowles broke in fiercely. "Is it by insults you seek to repay?"

"England sends us nothing," said Cheti Haiola. "I know what I know. You have looted the stores of Panton and Leslie. You have taken ships from ambush on the shore. You have captured forts already weak enough to fall. Does that make you a king? He who loots once will raid again at the spot which is weakest. If he cannot take from the white man, he will take from the red. When his enemies become too powerful, he will steal from his friends."

"You were with me, McKetch! You and Buckhart and your men! Do you swallow such words in silence?"

"We were with you to take a single fort," said Dan McKetch, "not to see England in power again, so that she might once more desert us all."

"Well said, Dan!" Doctor Buckhart approved. "We've seen you rise to great heights, William, every time to drop again, but a king is the greatest. Like Cheti Haiola, we serve no kings. They fall so far and so fast that the distance and speed would crush to powder a shooting star."

"Then I'll live to my name!" Bowles shouted. "What I can't win by friendship, I'll take by force. What say you, Kinhaizee? We've occupied Cheti Haiola's village. We'll be strengthened by Cheti Haiola's supplies and nourished by his fields and cattle. Sink me, I find it pleasing here. We came as friends. Since he's denounced us as his enemies, we'll stay where we are."

"You'll leave in peace as you came, General Bowles," said Cheti Haiola. "A wise commander looks about him before he shouts for war."

Artillery, wide-eyed, stared around the square. Stepped from the trees, as silently as deer come out to watch the fire, were Cheti Haiola's eighty braves of the team. The blazing logs threw flame on their paint and against their leveled muskets.

"You take this, Kinhaizee?" Bowles' voice was trembling. "What of your warriors? Shall they slink away like frightened skunks who created only a smell?"

"You'll do well to leave in peace and quiet, William," said Doctor Buckhart. "Kinhaizee's men are all unarmed, having wagered all their muskets today. Should you care to continue your course as king, I give you a thought in passing. War is a gamble. It's as well to learn the odds in a battle as it is in *tokonhay*. Both, my friend, are only a game of ball."

9

THE PONY ARTILLERY was riding had been loaned by Cheti Haiola to be returned by Hasse Micco in the fall. Unlike Artillery's smooth and swift mare, Black Cloud, it was a stocky little beast, tireless, but with a ragged, jolting gait that kept him from wanting to sleep in the saddle. Not that he could have slept, for he was far too full of the excitement of Kinhaizee's and General Bowles' retreat. Bowles had made no threats, but had ridden off silently with Kinhaizee's warriors and headed westward, probably on his way back to Fort San Marcos.

"'Sblood!" McKetch had exclaimed as he watched the departing Mickasookees. "You'll hear from him again, I warrant, Cheti Haiola."

The chief had shaken his head. "The fox that steals too many chickens collects too many baying hounds to follow his trail. The next news of him is when his course is run."

"Take ye some of that to heart, Dan," Doctor Zeke advised, "and digest it well."

"Hell's lead!" McKetch protested. "If I should be one to digest it, you should be one to swallow it whole. Do you set yourself up as a witch doctor at threescore years and ten? Who was it egged Kinhaizee and William into making wagers which lost them every gun?" He swung on the chief. "Or was it you, Cheti Haiola, who ordered back your crafty warriors from the full strength of their play?"

The chief said blandly, "What is done is done," and began making preparations for McKetch's departure.

Now they were already two hours on the way. Doctor Zeke, riding beside Artillery, had followed with interest the story of Artillery's trip through the swamp and with Hasse Micco across the prairie. While slower, it had been shorter than the poorly marked right-angle overland trail. That, Doctor Zeke figured, was close to thirty miles. With good riding, the party should reach the compound sometime the following morning.

The first hour of riding had been easy. The moon was bright, and lighted well the white sandy strip which bordered the edge of the prairie. At one point, Hasse Micco rode up by Artillery to point out the approximate place where the boat was hidden. It seemed incredible to think that what they had covered in something more than an hour on horseback had taken them, on foot through the prairie, the better part of a broiling day.

They had left the prairie for the woods an hour before, and there McKetch arranged his troop with a caution that had saved him so many times. He and Buckhart rode slightly in advance, letting Artillery and Hasse Micco follow behind. The rest of the horsemen strung out, two abreast, ever alert to watch the trail on either side. A single rider, swiftly mounted, followed as a rear guard, almost out of sight of the column.

It was being borne in on Artillery every day that suspicion and vigilance against attack were the price of life in Florida. He loved with all his soul its beauty and wildness and ever-changing terrain,

but his trip through the swamp had taught him that the very things which were friendly by day could become menacing with the darkness.

Now he had just ridden away from a lesson, that people were seldom to be trusted. He had seen Cheti Haiola's village saved by the old chief's subtle understanding that, like the swamp, a man might offer gifts and friendship in the morning and battle in the evening.

Artillery liked many people. It was not only disconcerting, but he found himself actually despondent to discover, in his maturing, that beauty and friendship meant little when you lived in a world governed by the law of who was weak and who was strong.

The trail they were on was scarcely more than a passage through the trees. The soft rhythm of the walking horses, the creak of leather, and the gentle jingle of spurs and metal trappings blended into a soothing melody. Caught by the moonlight, a warm soft breeze, and the somnolence of nearing summer, the horsemen rode without talking. The lane widened as they climbed a sandy hill. To the right, a small round lake made a spot of silver. Beside it stood a ghost house, letting light through skeleton ribs. Twenty years before, it had been some Englishman's plantation. Now it belonged to the woods again, its existence marked only by a smell of wild oranges and persimmon trees.

Watching the ruins, Artillery was reminded of General Bowles' statement to the Indians, "For thirty years you lived happily under England, and your people prospered," and what Dan had said, "—not to see England in power again, so that she might once more desert us all."

Dan's bitterness became more easy to understand, for England had deserted McKetch when he was useful and strong. The old soldier had lost none of his courage or cunning, but he must feel every day that his blue coat and silver buttons were only a skeleton of his once doughty colonel's uniform.

Maybe, like the house, Dan and Doctor Zeke and all the riders, and Bowles, and Kinhaizee, and the Mickasookees were merely skeletons from the past. Maybe only Artillery Armes and Hasse Micco were real because they were young. The years would pass swiftly. The moonlight might become brighter and filter through the troop of skeleton horsemen, and, like the house, they would be gone.

Another smell, sharper than oranges, struck his nostrils. His pony tossed its head and shot its ears up forward in alarm. Ten

lengths ahead, McKetch raised his hand and became a statue on Black Storm. There was smoke in the air, not the smoke of grass and weeds and burning trees that came when the graziers burned the land to bring up the tender grass shoots, but acrid smoke. In it were the smoldering odors of wood and varnish, of clothes and food and feathers.

It was merely a trickle, carried on the breeze, but Hasse Micco recognized it instantly as the column halted. He whispered to Artillery, "A house burned down."

Buckhart also raised his hand. The column stayed still, but there were sounds of muskets unslung and slipped from scabbards. A horse from the rear moved silently by Artillery, and he saw that the rider was Melchor Salazar. The Spaniard and McKetch dismounted and blended into a scraggly patch of scrub oak trees at the left. They came back again shortly, remounted, and the column moved on.

A hundred yards farther, a clearing of an acre had been cut beside the trail. It was in the clearing the fire smoldered. What had been a cabin the day before was now blackened ruins, sending up thin wisps of smoke from the ashes of a fallen beam. In the burned debris was a charred piece of wood, the headboard of a cradle, and another shape, which gave faint outlines of a homemade chair.

Ten yards from the ruins, the body of a woman lay. She had been very beautiful, and even in death retained a savage dignity. The single white garment left on her body was blood-stained and torn, revealing a skin of smoothest chocolate brown. Beyond the woman lay another corpse, a powerful black, clad only in breeches. The top of his head showed a bloody patch where his hair had been. His throat was a gash, cut from ear to ear. The only thing left entirely intact was a chicken coop, standing forlornly in front of the gutted cabin.

Artillery felt ill as McKetch swung himself from the saddle and began to poke around. The men in the column were silent as McKetch walked back and stood staring up at Hasse Micco.

"Christ's falling blood!" His voice was trembling. "There've been Indian ponies here, my fine young chief. When your good red brothers start out for rape and pillage, their traces are easily found."

"Blood is as red when shed by men of any color," said Hasse Micco. He slid from his pony, and ignoring McKetch, circled around the chicken coop to give a brief look at the slain man and woman.

Dan watched him, hands on pistols, his mustache upthrust sharply.

The Indian boy came back and squarely faced McKetch. "My people do not kill to rape—for we put to death those maddened by the moon. Neither do we kill our friends. This was Christopher, a free black, and his wife, Aluhena, a Maroon."

"'Sblood!" said McKetch. "The Creeks have raided and killed before. The lad Artillery knows too well—since the day he was born. There were Indian ponies here."

"There are two here now," Hasse Micco reminded him, "one ridden by me and one by Artillery, but they did not bring us here to kill. Also, there is a difference. The ponies who have left their mark at this scene of destruction were shod. None of those in our village wear a shoe. I know who owned the ponies."

Artillery said, "And I do, too."

"Then speak up, lad!" Doctor Zeke broke in.

"They belong to Firkin, the trader," Artillery explained quickly. "When he left our village last night that chicken coop was atop a load so heavy that I wondered how the pony might stand."

Doctor Buckhart rode a few yards forward, wheeled Savanna, and rode back again. "The lads are right, Dan. Your eyes are getting dim with rheum. Even from astride my mare, it's written plain that horses have been here too."

"And 'tis not an Indian scalping," said Hasse Micco.

McKetch looked at the ruined house again and got slowly into his saddle. "There are times," he said, "when death turns me into a fool. This is the work of 'moccasin boys' from Georgia, who try to play at red man so that all may think the Indians have done their killing." He wheeled Black Storm, and beckoned to Melchor Salazar. "Do you, Melchor, take charge of four others. Stay here and give the dead a decent burial and search the ruins. There may be a baby there, too. When finished, return to camp."

"There was a child," said Hasse Micco.

"This is not long past," said Dan. "Firkin's well liked, and a merry devil. His ponies should leave a trail as broad as a river. Is he robbed or killed, I've an itch to pull a trigger. What say you, Ezekiel?"

"I ride as always," said Buckhart, "when we have a call."

McKetch was off so quickly, with Buckhart by his side, that Artillery, on the Indian pony, found himself hard pressed to follow. The others strung out behind, their guns at ready across the saddle.

Following their example, Artillery took his rifle from the scabbard and checked the priming with care. He'd wanted to ride with Bowles and the men to take Fort San Marcos. Now his very first sight of stark destruction and brutal death had turned him. He was glad that when the Spanish fort fell he hadn't been there. His stomach was light inside, and gnawing, as though days had passed since he'd eaten.

He had a knife at his waist, and a tomahawk, and the finest rifle in Florida nesting in the crook of his arm. They had been toys before, or at the most, the tools of a hunter. In a flash, since he'd smelled the acrid smoke, all that had changed, as McKetch and Buckhart had changed, and Hasse Micco and the men riding grimly behind him. The axe and knife and gun had turned into weapons designed for death and mutilation.

The thought was shocking, and it aged him. Could he shoot with the same precision as he shot at a deer when the head of a man showed over the sights of his rifle? He had practiced for weeks with a tomahawk. Face to face with a charging foe, could he put that gold-inlaid bauble into deadly flight with the same quick skill? He thought he might if he met the ones who had ravaged the Christopher family. Such were worse than the snarling beasts of the woods and swamps, which he'd learned so well how to kill.

The moon went high, reached its peak, and began to lower. Still McKetch, on his tireless horse, held tight to the trail. Artillery tried to find some signs to mark the direction taken. Occasionally, he succeeded. They were riding through a mile of stubbly scrub oaks, scarcely taller than a man. Here a broken twig would hang. There he'd see some droppings left by the trader's Indian ponies. Once they crossed a trickle of water where the ground was soft, and the smaller, deeper hoofprints of the pack-laden animals McKetch was following showed clearly.

The oaks had changed to pines again and the moon was slanting strong behind the column, its light hard and cold, when McKetch and Doctor Zeke reined in.

Ahead, among the pines, a naked, horrible ghost was wandering. Feebly, it moved from side to side with hands outstretched, stumbling and bumping into trees. Its back and buttocks were livid with weals. It turned at the sound of Dan's halloo, started forward, and fell to its knees. The slanting moonlight struck it full. Joining its hands together, it raised them in supplication and uttered a plaintive wail.

Feeling sicker than he had at the sight of the Christophers,

Artillery recognized Firkin, but not by the twinkling, beady eyes, for they were gone. Two red sockets showed above the bulbous nose, and out of the sockets tears of blood rolled down over the puffy cheeks.

McKetch was off his horse in a bound and forward on foot to raise the kneeling man. When he had him standing, Artillery saw there were streaks of blood on the shriveled thighs from a wound beneath the rotund belly.

"Living blood of the sacred lamb!" said Doctor Zeke, and somehow it sounded more terrible and ominous than anything Artillery Armes had ever heard. In all his life, he'd never known Doctor Zeke to utter an oath before.

McKetch was bending his ear close to Firkin's trembling lips. The strung-out horsemen were closing up, and through their ranks went a muttering like wind in branches before a violent storm.

The naked man was swaying, only held upright by the support of Dan's strong arm. Suddenly, he collapsed into a shuddering heap at McKetch's feet. Dan picked him up without an effort and carried him close to the horsemen.

"Look well!" he commanded. "Here's a man who's harmed no one, begging me to kill him. God willing, he's dead now, or I'd have heeded his plea. Were he mutilated and blind, I could do no less for Black Storm. Such is the protection given traders by powerful Spain."

"I commend his soul to the All Most High! Ashes to ashes!" Doctor Buckhart's voice was deeper than usual, rolling like a drum. " 'Tis a night of death, Dan. Who did this thing? Have you learned? What scourges from the depths of hell are loosed on the country?"

"I've learned enough, Ezekiel." McKetch gently lowered his burden, then swept off his hat and mopped his brow. " 'Tis a gouger from Georgia called Drummond. He and a score of his moccasin boys are awaiting a shipment of slaves due in Fernandina—delayed now sixty days or more. Meantime, they've been ravishing the province."

"They're near, then." Doctor Zeke stared down at Firkin's disfigured body. "No man so abused could travel far before death relieved him. What had they, Dan, against this petty peddler?"

"They sought to find where he cached the stores he peddled. Finding he had no central storing place, they did this to him and turned him loose for the wolves to feed on—an evening's play for the Georgia scum."

Hasse Micco had sat his horse unmoving. He spoke when McKetch had finished and his tone brought back to Artillery the scene in the flowery dell, where Nethlehasse Micco sat dead in the hollow tree.

"This white man, Drummond, raids unhindered by buying officials of Spain. His camp, if it is the same, is but a league from here, and Tallaloko, my mother, may be still there in chains—though the talk, when I was prisoner there, was of returning post haste to Georgia."

"A belated vessel kept them here," said Dan McKetch. "Speak on, Hasse Micco. Can you find this camp? It would please us all to set your mother free."

"I have taken an oath in blood to the dead," said Hasse Micco. "If you swear to respect it, I will guide you there unheard and unseen."

"Name your oath, lad, and quickly," Buckhart broke in.

"Drummond must die by my hand alone. He has slain my father, enslaved my mother, and imprisoned and wounded me."

"Big words for a stripling!" McKetch exclaimed. "Hell's lead, Ezekiel! The Indian lad has a spirit that pleases me. Take charge, boy! Drummond shall be saved for you—unless he tries to skewer me!"

Two men stayed to bury Firkin, with orders to follow, and the column moved off with Hasse Micco leading.

The moon was much lower when they quitted the trail for the thickness of unmarked pines. There, all dismounted, except Buckhart, McKetch, Hasse Micco, and Artillery.

Hasse Micco explained that Drummond always posted sentries—usually four. They would have to be found and accounted for, or a surprise attack would fail. Drummond had two small cannon, and should not be given time to get them into action.

The men on foot were deployed through the woods to form a giant circle with orders, when Drummond's campfire was sighted, to close slowly in. They were to take the sentries as they found them, but make no noise.

Artillery and the other three rode on. Grass grew higher beneath the horses. Then came bushes, almost scraping the animals' bellies. In a clump of hardwood trees, Hasse Micco halted, and they all dismounted. The horses were tethered, except Black Storm, who was trained to stand alone.

Artillery's legs were leaden when he found his feet on the ground. The bushes tugged at him warningly, halting his progress,

telling him that ahead lay death, warning him that he had reached a fork in the road of life. One way led to flight and safety, the other to bloodshed. No matter which he chose, there was no returning. Either was a road he must follow as long as he lived, a well-marked trail emblazoned with the signpost "Cowardice" or "Bravery."

The four had spread out. To his right was McKetch, and to his left, Hasse Micco, moving with no more noise than spirals of mist drifting from tree to tree. Farther to his left was Doctor Zeke, no longer benevolent, but a man who had kept himself alive for scores of years by mastering every known trick of force and strategy.

Artillery knew his own will was lacking, and that the strength which kept him going was drawn from his three companions, moving forward so steadily. There was the knowledge, too, that the lives of others were dependent now upon his mastering himself and holding steadfast. He had become a link in a human chain, which was tightening its loop inexorably.

Five slow paces forward, then five more, and the pinkish light of the fire, blended with the filtered moonlight, touched on Doctor Zeke's white beard and threw a reflection on the silvered bark of a tree.

A man was leaning against the tree. He was no more than a silhouette deforming the trunk. Artillery wouldn't have seen him if the man had stayed still, but a rustling leaf or a crackling twig must have warned him, for he stood up straight, shifting his musket, and a line of pink showed between his figure and the silvered tree.

Artillery stopped. The woods were silent. The man gave a single, throaty, rattling, gasping sigh. The musket he was holding fell from his grasp. He swayed, was caught, and gently lowered. Another figure straightened, and the firelight reflected itself on six large silver buttons and silhouetted a hat with a sweeping plume.

Artillery found himself moving forward again, his heart pounding madly to a point of bursting as he watched McKetch plunge his knife to the hilt in the sand, clean it swiftly, and restore it to its scabbard. They passed the sentry, sitting and leaning dead against the tree, as still as stone.

The firelight grew brighter. Caution became less necessary, for the night was filled with sounds of drunken laughter and ribald song. The fetid smell of a badly-kept camp—garbage, bodies, sweating horses and excrement—was suddenly strong.

Buckhart closed in on Artillery and stayed him with a hand. Together, they moved to another tree, and the camp could be seen. Artillery's mind and nerves revolted, for he might have been staring

at one of Doctor Zeke's graphic word-pictures of hottest hell brought to earth and set down in reality.

A Negro girl was tied to a stake by the fire, her hands high above her. She hung limp in a faint, and her naked back had been lashed until blood ran down. A bearded man with matted hair black and thick on his chest stood near. He was stripped to the waist and held an ox-whip in one enormous hand. His teeth shone white through his heavy black beard as he grinned in pleasure, watching the girl.

Somehow, Artillery knew it was Drummond. The bestial face and the two reddened eyes were coming to him clear and precise across the sights of his rifle. Doctor Buckhart reached out and gently pushed the leveled weapon down.

There were other men, a score or more, seated around the fire, drinking, laughing, and singing. One got to his feet with a gourd of water and dashed it on the girl. She stirred, and Drummond raised his whip. A shot rang out from somewhere, and the man with the gourd went down.

The world became a vortex, swirling about Artillery. There was no time to fire, not even time to raise his gun. He was smashing at faces with the butt, dodging a figure, on him with drawn knife, swinging his rifle barrel wildly at another. When he turned again to the man with the knife, he was just in time to see one of Dan McKetch's men run his attacker through. It was then he noticed that Drummond had gone.

Artillery slipped from out of the crowd of struggling, cursing figures. Blood had splashed in his face and eyes. He dashed the back of his hand against it, rubbing his vision clear. The woods enfolded him. He crashed through bushes, running blindly toward the spot where they had left the horses tethered.

Others were there before him. He was in time to see Buckhart and Hasse Micco mounting. A rapid, muffled beat of hoofs on sand, growing fainter, told him that McKetch was already in pursuit of Drummond. There was just one horse in Florida that could run the thick woods with such crazy speed—Black Storm.

Artillery leaped to his Indian pony as he jerked the tether free. In twenty lengths, he had overtaken Hasse Micco, but Doctor Zeke, on the fleet Savanna, was already nothing but an echoing sound. He and Hasse Micco trailed it, lying flat against the ponies' necks to escape the sweeping branches, pushing the logy ponies to their full.

They had ridden more than half a league through sand and brush and mud and brambles when the ponies burst out of the

pinewoods and into a small depression. A green, scummed pond lay at the bottom, rimmed by a bank of pure white sand. The clearing around the button-sized lake was bright as day with the light of the moon.

McKetch and Drummond were on their feet, fighting by the lakeside. Black Storm stood still nearby, close to a dappled roan, which reared and shied as the fighting men moved round and round, sending out sparks from their clashing sabers.

McKetch was driving Drummond back, though Drummond was three-stone the larger, for Dan loved fighting as he loved his life. The point of his sword was everywhere before him. His left hand held his hat with the sweeping plume.

Buckhart sat watching, the reins held tight on Savanna.

"Christ's blood!" yelled McKetch. "I've saved him for you, Hasse Micco. He fights like the women he loves to torture."

Drummond lunged, but the point of McKetch's sword was close to his face.

"Hell's molten lead! I can make him dance. He needs his ox-whip with longer reach. I'll drive him back till he's near your horse, lad. Then stick your knife between his shoulders. It's the kind of a death he'll understand, though 'twill be a pity to have him die with a sword in his hands. He's not a man. He's a wind from his mother's bowels that found refuge in her womb."

Drummond wheeled and stepped backward until he was sideways to Artillery. The sword he was holding leveled, and Artillery thought that his own keen eyes had been dimmed by the blood which had spattered them and were playing him tricks. He had never seen a sword like Drummond's. The hilt was overlarge and cumbersome. Either that piece of metal by Drummond's thumb was a frizzen, or Artillery had gone mad from the light of the springtime moon.

McKetch bored in and the black-bearded man fell swiftly back another pace. Once again, the heavy sword was level, holding steady in front of Dan's heart. Drummond's thumb moved, and a hammer clicked back.

From his seat on the Indian pony, Artillery threw. The gold-inlaid tomahawk made a glittering streak as it sped in flight. The razor-sharp blade sank itself in Drummond's shoulder. With a scream and an oath, he dropped his sword, but before he could move, Hasse Micco had spurred his pony close, leaped from its back on top of Drummond, and a shimmering blade had flashed just once.

"Christ's falling blood!" yelled Dan McKetch. "Do I live to fight

like a puling babe? Is my sword arm weak that I've screamed for help from diapered boys? I thought to make this bloody butcher dance awhile before giving him peace by putting him close to Hasse Micco. Did I ask to have him hatcheted—"

Buckhart had climbed from Savanna and picked up Drummond's fallen sword.

"You'll prattle yourself into hell some day," he told McKetch. "Artillery's sharp eyes have saved you."

"Saved me?" McKetch demanded fiercely. "Am I then—"

"You're old, McKetch!" Doctor Zeke broke in. "That's what you are. I'll say the second time tonight that your eyes are dimmed with rheum. There's a pistol set here in the hilt of Drummond's sword. That's why he fell back with such tender ease before your feeble onslaught. He'd leveled his sword to shoot you when Artillery threw. Have you had enough? Hasse Micco killed him as he'd sworn to do."

McKetch stepped close and examined the sword. He touched the heavy pistol barrel, cunningly fastened along the top of the saber blade.

"Aye," he said. "I've had enough. The saber was leveled. If Drummond had shot, the bullet would have found me true. Times move too fast, Ezekiel. It's strange, is it not, that wise men do but little, while those who live by force and murder spend so much of their life and brain inventing something new."

They rode back into the camp again where McKetch's men had taken over. There were dead laid out by the fire now. Hungry blacks had been released from their chains and were being fed. The girl cut down from the torture post was still alive, and weeping.

Among the slaves, Hasse Micco found his mother, and gave her simple greeting. "I killed him for you as I'd sworn to do."

It was all unreal to Artillery. Everything was a dream that had passed, never to appear in the same harsh light again.

There was one thing real, and that alone. There was blood on the blade of his tomahawk.

His days as a boy were through.

BOOK THREE

1805

★

ARTILLERY ARMES

★

CHAPTER 1

THE weather of Florida made landmarks in the life of Artillery Armes. All changes had their compensations. The bitter cold, which lasted for short, deadening periods every winter and sent him sometimes from his bed to shiver about the edge of a roaring fire, equally rid the encampment of the pestiferous insects and brought great flocks of succulent wild ducks into the nearby marshes.

Relief from the cold came with spring, but the insects returned, and a new caution was necessary against the deadly rattlers and moccasins, come out from hibernation to bask in the sun. It was worth the work in the fields, though, to smell the sweetness of blossoming trees and flowers, and to know that the fish of lake and stream would soon begin to strike again.

Summer, with its enervating heat, brought food—watermelons and other fruits, and tender greens and corn. For a number of years it had also brought Hasse Micco. For a few lazy months that went all too fast, they would ride together, study together, and roam and explore the swamps and woods and prairies.

Twice he had returned to Cheti Haiola's village with his Indian friend when Hasse Micco departed in the fall. The village had become a second home. Its occupants had changed from "Indians" to individuals, with troubles and loves and hates and marked likes and dislikes of their own. Like the men and women and children who made up the families on Dan McKetch's plantation, Artillery discovered that he knew them all.

Once, accompanied by Cheti Haiola and Tallaloko, he had traveled far and visited the Negro village on the banks of the Apalachicola set up by the northern slaves who had found refuge

among the Seminoles. It proved to be a place of kindliness, hard work, laughter, and song. It might have been perfect had not constant danger overshadowed it. But since Drummond's raid, nearly five years before, guns had been emplaced, always ready, and sentries were posted from dusk to dawn.

Ripened into maturity far too quickly, Artillery had found that danger was the keynote of the province. Badly policed by inadequate detachments of underpaid Spanish dragoons, whose pay from His Most Catholic Majesty, Charles III, was usually long overdue, Florida had grown more and more into a refuge for bandits, pirates, murderers, and thieves. These poured in from the United States, the English colonies, France, and Spain. Violence was their law. With this influx, the harassment and danger to peaceful colonizers steadily grew.

Thomas Jefferson, seeing the picture with long-range vision from Washington, winked slyly at the turmoil and cannily encouraged more Americans to trek toward Florida and settle. Some day, he hoped there would be enough citizens of the United States ensconced in the province to take it quietly away from Spain and avoid the bloodshed of another war.

The Spanish governor, Quesado, politically wiser than most, had sensed Jefferson's intentions. Some years before, during Quesado's administration, the generous land grants which had brought Artillery's father and mother into the province, had been withdrawn. Acceptance of Catholicism had become a requisite for such Americans as wished to become citizens under Spain. Taxes were high, almost confiscatory. It was easier, as McKetch and many others had found, to accept the status of lawlessness and pay no taxes at all.

Governor Enrique White, who had succeeded Quesado when Artillery was eight years old, had been forced into even more stringent methods to discourage American settlers. Now, in 1805, when Artillery was seventeen, the governor had banned American immigration entirely. The province had become closed. Only those commercial travelers with specific business were allowed to land at St. Augustine or cross the St. Mary's River, and they were forced to leave again as soon as their business was completed. The oath of allegiance, once administered so freely, was delivered no more.

Artillery had heard much talk between Dan and Doctor Zeke, but the evidence of his eyes was stronger. The families left in the compound were few. Fields were growing up in weeds every day.

More of the houses began to look like that of Jacques Lemain, staring at him with sightless windows. Dan's laugh was just as hearty, but he drank more bombo, and his fierce mustache was touched with streaks of gray. Amy's hair was growing white. Occasionally, she walked around the compound, looking lost and with little to say, gazing at the deteriorating houses.

Doctor Zeke still sat Savanna as straight as ever, but he read his Bible longer, and his prayers were more numerous. There were times when rain poured on the rooftops that he wouldn't leave his bed all day.

The danger and the feeling of change became more acute for Artillery as it always did with the coming of fall. He missed Hasse Micco, for one thing. In September, the air became unbreathable, and days went by full of hazy sunshine merging into cloudiness, as though Florida were waiting for a storm.

Doctor Zeke was in Fernandina. Late in the afternoon, Artillery had been attracted by an altercation between Dan and Amy. It had ended by Dan saddling Black Storm and riding away on some errand of his own.

After a silent supper alone with Amy, Artillery was sitting on the porch of McKetch's house, his feet on the rail, when a horseman rode in. The man hesitated at the open, unguarded gates of the compound. Artillery dropped his feet to the floor and stiffened. It was not yet too dark for him to distinguish the white waistcoat and trousers of a Spanish uniform.

The man rode slowly up to the steps of the house, dismounted, and tethered his dapple-gray horse to the rail. Inside, Amy was lighting candles. The man came up the steps. The light from a candelabra set in the window struck his gilt buttons and purple facings, marking an officer of the First Regiment of Cuba, which was stationed in St. Augustine.

"*Buenos noches,*" said Artillery from his place in the corner.

The man turned, startled, his hand half extended to knock on the door. He took off his visorless Spanish morion, and the red plume which stuck above the hat made an arc as he swept it toward the floor. "Senor." His heels clicked, and he gave a formal military bow. "You are Senor McKetch?" He peered closer through the gloom.

Artillery saw that his face was thin, high-cheeked, and mocking, and his figure slender as a rapier. A black mustache, no thicker than a crayon mark, adorned his upper lip and continued down in a U-shaped beard around the edge of his olive chin. It gave his

narrow countenance an effect of being broader at the bottom than it really was, as though nature might have forgotten to supply the wide mouth with its narrow lips at birth, and set them in afterwards.

"Colonel McKetch is not here." Artillery stood up. "I'm Artillery Armes. Perhaps I can help you."

"Colonel McKetch?" The Spaniard spoke on a rising note. "Has the Senor McKetch returned to the British Army then? I am desolated that we in St. Augustine did not know."

"Well, he *was* a colonel," Artillery protested.

"Assuredly, Senor Armes. But that was so long ago. Today—" He shrugged, and clicked his heels again. "Permit me. I am Don Jose de Reduro, nephew of Manuel Marco Jesus Roberto de Reduro of Valencia, Capitan in the First Havana Regiment of His Most Catholic Majesty, aide to His Excellency, Enrique White, Governor of East Florida—stationed for the moment, by a great misfortune, in that cesspool of dying fish known as St. Augustine."

Artillery inclined himself at the waist in deference to the importance of his visitor. "Your servant, sir."

Reduro toyed with a gilded button. "Are you Spanish?"

"No, Senor Capitan."

"You speak it well."

"I have spoken it since I can remember. Doctor Buckhart taught me when I was very young."

"Ah," said Reduro. "And you are older now?"

"I'm overseer of the plantation, senor."

"Of course," said Reduro. "And the estimable Doctor Buckhart who taught you so well. Is he here?"

"No, senor."

"But you expect him soon—with Senor McKetch perhaps?"

"They did not say."

"Then you would have no objection to my waiting? They might return."

"They might," said Artillery. He pushed a chair forward. "Won't you sit down?"

"*Gracias.*" Reduro settled himself languidly.

Artillery clapped his hands. The house-girl came to the door, and he said, "Bring wine."

Reduro took from his pocket two thin, black Cuban cigars, and offered one to Artillery.

"I have worked too hard in the tobacco fields, captain, to

smoke except but rarely," Artillery told him. "A pipe with the Indians now and again, but no more."

Reduro said, "With your permission," and lit his own.

The smoke was fragrant, but strong. The maid brought wine and glasses on a burnished silver tray. Artillery poured.

After a time, Reduro said, "You live well, senor. Your glass is of the thinnest, and your wine of the finest body. Far better than one tastes in St. Augustine."

"We make our own."

"Assuredly." The tip grew bright on the captain's cigar. "And none for export, I trust, since the making of wine for export is forbidden in the province, and Senor McKetch is always most careful to live within the law."

Artillery was silent. Stirring inside of him was a note of warning, a trace of the same uneasiness which had plagued him the night that Bowles had spoken to the Seminoles and tried to win over Cheti Haiola. He could understand the blustering, ambitious General Bowles. He could fight against the bullying cruelty of a blackguard such as Drummond. And now, for no apparent reason, he felt doubly fearful and doubly conscious of peril in the presence of this suave and polished Spanish dragoon. He listened, hoping that he might hear the familiar hoofbeats of Savanna or Black Storm.

Reduro seemed to be listening, too. "So you oversee the plantation, Senor Armes?" he remarked at last.

"*Si, senor.*"

"I regret I've never visited it before. I find it most delightful, and your hospitality gracious. It is strange what misinformation is passed about among those who live in the province. I expected to have great difficulty in obtaining admission to see the Senor McKetch. I have been told his defenses are very strong."

"They were," said Artillery. "We have no need for them now. For a while, everybody was after Dan, and he had to protect himself. He's done no wrong."

"Assuredly." Reduro tossed away his cigar. "Behold! I come expecting to be faced with cannon, and I find no sentry, and the gates ajar. My wine is served on silver plate. I've traveled much about the province, senor, and scarcely ever have I seen so much prosperity provided from a simple farm. It's apparent, no, that Senor McKetch is a gentle soul?"

"He can fight when he has to, but he's kind and good."

Captain Reduro turned his head, and the candlelight caught

his mocking smile. "There are others who were kind and good, Senor Armes, who unfortunately disagreed with the laws of Spain and with the laws of our neighboring country, too. Perhaps His Excellency, the Governor, is over-touchy. But some years ago our Fort San Marcos on the Gulf was taken by a man named Bowles. He had some help from others. You were younger then, and so was I. Does your memory perhaps still serve you?"

"Dan had to live," said Artillery. "And so did others. You've shut out everybody from settling in Florida and from trading here, except John Forbes and Company, who pay you well. Dan's taken what he had to, but he's never done anyone any harm."

"There was a man named Drummond." The captain gave a disparaging cluck. "He was working within the Spanish law. Slaves are property, Senor Armes. He came down here from Georgia to receive a shipment in the open port, Fernandina, and while here he captured some runaways." Reduro shrugged. "What happened to him and his legitimate traders he was never able to tell. We rake old coals, senor. All that is past and gone."

He left his chair, and leaned against the railing, facing Artillery. "Now you oversee this peaceful farm. Can you speak for McKetch?"

"I can listen," said Artillery.

"Then I can speak for Spain. I am kindly, like the senor who is absent, and I have a great revulsion to doing anyone harm. Perhaps through a misunderstanding, a reward has been offered for the capture of this kindly man, either dead or alive. It is two hundred doubloons, a not inconsiderable sum of money, when Spanish soldiers are hungry in St. Augustine and money due us from Mexico is not forthcoming due to trouble there."

Artillery stood up. "You are most kind, Senor Capitan, to take this trouble to warn him."

"And you most naive, *amigo*." His black eyes narrowed, and he leaned a trifle closer. Then his white teeth flashed. "Or is it I who am naive, and you who are wise? I came here not to warn him, but to take him, and I find him gone."

"It has happened before," said Artillery.

"At those times," said Reduro slowly, "Spain was weak, and he was strong. Tonight, a score of dragoons are watching the trail to your fortress here, senor. Or should I call it a farm? Must I make myself clearer?"

"It might be wise," said Artillery.

"You have mentioned John Forbes and Company, who trade profitably and at will in this province. You have said they pay us

well, a statement which might be misunderstood, senor, were I a man of choleric temper. Were you by any mischance referring to an individual, it might smack that you thought of bribery."

"My thoughts are my own," said Artillery.

Reduro's face clouded. "John Forbes and Company pay taxes, senor, as did their predecessors, Panton and Leslie."

"For what?"

"For protection."

"You astonish me, *Excelencia.* Or perhaps I misunderstand the word 'protection' when it is spoken in Spanish. The only protection I've seen since my birth has been the protection of gun and cannon. Were Panton and Leslie pleased with the protection offered their trader, Firkin? Or did you keep his eyeless, castrated body safe from their view? I've listened for Dan. Now I'll speak for him. It's better he's not here. He'd never pay you, and knowing his temper, the only protection needed would be for you."

Reduro smiled, but his eyes were cold. "You caught some of his temper yourself, *amigo,* and his hastiness, too. There was one named Bowles who felt the same. He believed also in the weakness of Spain. But the fort which he took and held for four years fell before nine Spanish gunboats some months ago. He lies now in the darkest dungeon of Morro Castle in Havana."

"I don't believe it." Artillery stepped back.

"An error which may prove your naivete more than your wiseness, senor. It happens to be true."

"And what are you asking?"

Reduro lifted his eyebrows. "Is it not obvious, senor? Spain is not greedy. She asks only that to which she's entitled—taxes—which all who settle here must pay. The Senor McKetch will be pleased with our strength." He waved an arm. "Your guns and cannon are no longer needed. You've said so yourself, and in five years now nothing has molested you. So you've grown under Spain. While the rest of the province suffers, you live in the utmost luxury on your little farm." He paused and straightened. "Senor, the day is come when your taxes are due. They have not been paid for twenty years, and now they are due."

"And suppose," Artillery asked in a deadened voice, "that we haven't gold enough, or that Dan refuses to pay?"

Reduro shrugged again. "It will be most painful, Senor Armes. Two hundred doubloons reward can be collected, of course, and the property confiscated for the crown. But it would make His Excellency, the Governor, most unhappy."

"I suppose you have the amount all figured."

"Assuredly," said Reduro. "A nation must move with caution, and one of our agents has spent some time amongst you. We scarcely believed that Senor McKetch had become so bold as to open his gates and abandon his ready cannon or we might have moved before. Two thousand doubloons is the only amount by which this tax can be settled. And if that's not paid—" The captain clicked his heels and bowed. "The most unhappy General Bowles will be forced to move over and make room in his dungeon for another. My compliments to Senor McKetch. You can tell him he will be there, too."

2

A GREAT CLOUD was gathering above the blacker band of the swampland. It was riding higher, thrusting jagged fingers upward, feeling for a better handhold to fit itself more securely over weaker gray clouds that were hiding the watery moon.

Artillery lay on his cot, watching it through the window. He knew the routine, the oppressiveness, so heavy that even the hardy mosquitoes were loath to fly. Soon and without warning, a triple streak of lightning would split the cloud and plunge forked ends into the swamp with a deafening crash. Then everything would be quiet until the first few drops of rain, large as shillings, began to fall.

He had bowed Don Jose de Reduro out an hour before, but the captain had not gone. Artillery knew that as well as he knew the inevitability of the coming storm. The captain was waiting, standing with the patience of Spain, outside of the open compound gates.

Artillery moved restlessly. He found that his shirt was soaked with sweat which had seeped through into the ticking of the mattress. He sat up on the cot edge, searched with his toes, found his moccasins, and slipped them on. It was very dark as he faced inside the room.

Walking more by instinct than by sight, he went to the barn in back of the house, spoke softly to Black Cloud to quiet her, and saddled her in the darkness. The feel of her smooth skin and muscled flank gave him some comfort. She was as swift and as sure and as silent as the black cloud forming over the swampland. He had no

means of finding Dan and carrying a warning or he would have mounted her then, not to be stopped by all the dragoons in the province. He had no plan, but his heart and his nerves all told him he might need her badly before daybreak.

A ripple touched her, and her ears went forward. Artillery stood with his soothing hand firm against her neck and listened. His senses were already taut from listening, but there was still no sound of a rider, heralding Dan or Doctor Buckhart. Instead, it was music.

Farther down the sandy road, Damien Salazar had struck a chord. His fingers plucked the usual introduction. Then, accompanied by his soft guitar, his sad, clear voice went into an ancient ballad of Vicente Espinel's, brought from Spain a hundred years before. Melchor, his father, joined in the chorus:

"El bien dudoso, el mal seguro y cierto."

Artillery knew the song himself, and found he was following it chord by chord, remembering the many lessons Damien had given him on the guitar. Tonight there was no peace in the plaintive music, for the words of the chorus held a menace. He repeated them softly in English:

"The good is doubtful; the bad, sure and certain."

He smoothed Black Cloud's soft nose and left her. Outside the barn he paused, then took a little-used path which passed near the rusty cannon to the gate of the compound. *The bad is sure and certain.* There was too much truth in the song. He wished tonight he could turn back time and leave things to Dan and Doctor Zeke.

Still, there wasn't much to leave or save. In three whole years, but one new couple had moved into the compound, and that was a month before. The man, Robert Stone, a Georgian, to Artillery looked swarthy and evil, but Esther, his silent, pale, blond wife, in contrast, possessed a delicately rounded figure and a mischievous eye. In the month they had been there, Stone had proved lazy and of little use to anyone. Artillery felt sure it was only on Esther's account that McKetch had allowed the couple in, for Stone had been in some serious trouble with the Georgia law. Dan might have grown older, but he had never lost his fondness for golden hair and pale white skin.

As to the others, Melchor Salazar, his wife, and Damien had stayed. Amy was still faithful to Dan, and waiting. Ruiz Miranda, more morose and uncommunicative, still tilled his few acres, and Angela, grown more seductive at twenty-one, still kept house for her father. Outside of them, less than a dozen families were left on

the whole plantation—and Reduro wanted back taxes of two thousand doubloons.

Artillery stopped inside near the gates and leaned against one of the cannon. One fact suddenly stood out with startling clearness —Reduro and Governor White must know that McKetch had no such amount in gold. Thirty-two thousand American dollars! Why, even at its utmost peak, the entire compound had never been worth anything approaching such a sum. It could only mean that Spain had decided that the career of Dan McKetch had reached an end long overdue.

Tonight, with the coming of Reduro, some element of the plantation, which had been Artillery's life, had crumbled. He found he could look through the darkness and see things white and clear as he never had before. He had always thought life bright and gay and replete with delicious tastes and smells. Now, in a flash it had turned ugly with truth. It was difficult to accept it, to look at the bare gray bones of decaying wood and rusting iron and admit that his home had never been a home, but a port of missing men.

"Build your house upon a rock," Doctor Zeke had often quoted. This was a house that was built on sand.

He ran his hand along the breech of the cannon. Once it had been large, too big for him to straddle. Tonight it had shrunk, as Black Cloud had, and the path from the barn to the compound gate.

Standing in the increasing blackness, he knew at last that the cannon was a feeble thing, helpless without a man to load it, without a brain to direct it, and human hands controlled by that brain to ram it full of powder and ball. Even then it could never save the compound or protect McKetch, or guard Doctor Zeke from some day dying.

In one stark moment he was face to face with time and conscious of it. He was sick with the realization that men were little and puny, and that such creatures built compounds and made nations and thought and believed that guns could save them forever.

Again he saw clearly Dan McKetch holding in his arms the lifeless body of Firkin, the trader, and heard Doctor Zeke say, "Ashes to ashes." Only this time he understood, and the understanding was bitter. Dan and Doctor Zeke and Cheti Haiola and Hasse Micco and he, himself, would some day go, and only their kindly deeds and their usefulness to others would be left behind them. Some day, McKetch's kindliness would be all that was left

of the compound. Some day, the name of Ponce de Leon, who was a man of heart, might be all that was left of Spain. Some day the deeds of the Jesuit priests, who had been men of peace, might be all that was left of the mighty Church.

Youth and strength were blossoming to the north in a stripling nation, the United States. Its growing strength was the talk of the province. Tonight, like many other things, it seemed a mirage, clearer than reality in his new-found vision. It, too, in time would leave only the memory of kindly men. Its guns, its ships, and its buildings must crumble as the compound was crumbling. Like Spain and England and France and the powerful Creeks and Seminoles, and like Carthage and Rome, time would sweep it out of existence. Only strength of spirit and love and understanding could save it from inevitable fall.

There were whispers outside of the compound gate. Artillery moved closer, edging his back along the wall. At the gate, he could see Reduro, the whiteness of his uniform broken by a woman held tight in his arms. For a moment Artillery listened shamelessly to the sound of a kiss and soft-spoken Spanish endearments.

He knew the woman was Angela. Her caressing voice was one he could never forget. Anger possessed him. She must have known Reduro before. The most brazen strumpet could scarcely have found time to make a place for herself in the Spaniard's arms on such an unexpected call.

He remembered Reduro's mention of an agent of Spain planted in the compound, and his fingers closed tight on the knife at his waist. It wasn't enough that McKetch and Buckhart were aging and that the compound was rotting. Ruiz Miranda and his daughter, who had found it a sanctuary, must sell out to Spain and add to its dry rot from within. It was too late for killing, far too late for anything.

Artillery released his knife and turned. The candles in McKetch's house were snuffing, throwing Amy's distorted shadow across the window as she moved around. She left three burning in the window toward the compound gate. They were always burning when Dan was away, small, steady beacons to welcome him in.

Artillery followed the path back to the house to lie on the cot and listen to Damien sing and play. The tinkling music came very clear, undisturbed by any other sound. Each note dropped with a soft caress, carrying centuries of fiery love from ancient Spain. He should be worried, upset about Dan, disturbed by the governor's

threatened confiscation. Instead, he was tingling with a sense of freedom and a new approach to scenes unknown.

Doctor Zeke had told him many times of the money left by his father, which was his when he wanted to use it. It was a fortune —five hundred doubloons! He and Doctor Zeke and Dan and Amy could ride away together, buy new land in Georgia, maybe, or the Carolinas, purchase cattle and leave the dying plantation to dying Spain. He'd meet a girl—

The heat of the night was enfolding him, mixing with Damien's passionate chords, harrying his body, pumping a stream of molten desire into his brain. *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.* He rolled from the sweaty cot and lit a candle. Doctor Zeke would send him to the Bible. It was there on the shelf, its cover crumbling with the dust of ancient leather.

He knew too well what the Bible would prove, that the righteous were Spartan and void of desire, treating the venial wants of the body with rigorous disdain. Such thoughts were sacrilegious. He would search the all-wise book for help.

He reached out for it, and picked instead the poems of John Donne.

> *Makes virtue woman? Must I cool my blood*
> *Till I both be, and find one, wise and good?*
> *May barren angels love so!*

He took it back to the cot with him and sat on the edge, holding the candle close to the pages. Hot tallow dripped down, cooling in hardening patches on his trembling hand. So many things had come alive tonight. The teachings and the wiseness of Doctor Zeke, which had only been arduous printed words and distasteful tasks of a schoolboy, were unfolding quietly, like a night-blooming flower in full fruition. He was learning the strength of the Bible and equally how it could help the human warmth and beauty of a poet long dead. Unwittingly, he had mastered a lesson—that only by contrast were thoughts made strong.

He was back again on the log in the creek, watching Angela's nakedness glisten in the dappled sunlight. He was back again in Cheti Haiola's village, watching the sinuous sway of the naked savage women, hot and natural as the leaping flames.

He hated her, and struck with his new-found knowledge, realized how closely hate was knit with desire. She belonged to Dan. She was a strumpet, a vixen, a baggage, and every curve of

her body was close against him as she stood by the gate with Don Jose de Reduro's arms about her and her lips pressed close to his. Yet he owned her as much as McKetch had owned her, and had bedded her more in his dreams.

He snapped shut the book that was torturing him with its potent beauty and its lines that made the bodies of women sing. He blew out the candle and threw it far, listening until it stopped its roll. The book he placed on the window sill beside the cot, where he could reach out now and again and touch it. The lines still swam before him, wavering like ripples on the stream.

Damien stopped singing on a last strange minor plucked from the guitar.

The jagged lightning split the sky, and splintered a tree in the swampland.

He saw her standing in the doorway before he heard the thunder's roar. She came and sat down on the edge of the cot. The back of her frock brushed his side and he moved away hurriedly, closer to the wall. He knew what she'd say before she spoke.

"The young *caballero.*"

She had no mind, and clung to the one weak witticism she'd ever made, dragging it back from five years before.

He didn't answer. Once again the lightning flashed, and the first large drops of rain began to fall. Her fingers touched him, moving like tiny branding irons along the length of his arm. When she reached his hand, he moved it away.

"I saw your light. I thought you might be lonely. Do you mind? I'm afraid of a storm."

"I saw you being comforted at the gate," he told her.

"*La!*" She laughed. "The resplendent Spanish captain. He is a cousin."

"Not too distant, apparently," said Artillery.

The rain grew louder on the roof. She half turned and leaned closer until he could feel her warm breath on his face.

"Do you never grow up? Once I told you to come see me again when you'd reached the age of a man. I kissed you then. Do you not remember?"

"Should I?" asked Artillery. "Should I remember each meal that Amy has served me since I was born? You give your kisses as freely from what I've heard and seen."

"I wonder that you've seen anything. For six years now I've watched you, and you've never looked at me, except tonight—to spy."

She moved, and placed her hand on his chest. The first full flood of rain crashed down. He tried to push her away, and found himself helpless. Her fingers crept gently and touched his breast. The lightning flashed, and outside the window the rain was lighted into a solid wall of blue and silver. She was loosening the knot at her bosom with her other hand.

She lay down beside him, and every thought was swept away—of Reduro and the agent in the compound and the fact that she or her father might be a Spanish spy. Her breasts were close against him, bare. And still he couldn't kiss her.

"Thou shalt not covet—"

She found his lips, and his powerful fingers closed strong on her naked shoulders, digging in until she moaned with the pain.

"You're still a boy!" She was close to sobbing. "Or are you merely a walking corpse, or a gelding? Is there any warmth back of those cold blue eyes and under that yellow hair?"

The dungeon-dark room was peopled with spirits. The crumbling Bible glowed on the shelf, and Buckhart stood there, menacing his soul with a fear of hell and his body with upraised cane, and Dan McKetch and his glittering black eyes and his sweeping plume were there.

She was crying now with harsh, full sobs.

"You're McKetch's woman!" His tone was full of brutal purity.

She broke his grip with a shuddering wrench, and sank her teeth in his shoulder. "He has a woman," she said as she raised her head. "Many women. A new one now—the washed-out Esther. Will McKetch, then, stop you from being a man? *Dios!* What do you care?"

He closed his eyes to shut out the ghosts of his teaching, but even through tight-shut lids they still stood there.

"You're McKetch's woman," he said again. "I'll have no dalliance with—"

She shut off "traitors" with her lips on his. His body went limp and strengthless. Gently, she brushed back his hair.

"The young *caballero* need have no fear," she was whispering, as she kissed him. "The bold McKetch's days are run, *amigo*. He will bed his pallid blonde tonight, but he'll have no other woman for many a year."

He went cold at her words, the passion in his body dead as a murdered sentry, his brain alive with calculating sanity again. With the skill and restraint of a man far older, he simulated warmth and began to return her caresses. Inside, his heart was vicious. He

wanted to arouse her now, break her down, not to get her body, but to lull her caution. He ended a kiss that left her exhausted, and lay back on his pillow, listening to the rain.

"Fool!" she said. "Must you always stop—must you?" She was kneeling now beside the cot.

"You must go." He made a move as though to push her away. "I'm loyal to Dan—"

"You're afraid!"

"*Si.* Maybe afraid," he admitted, "but he's been like a father to me since I was born. Could I do this thing and face him in the light of day?"

"*Dios!* You are still too young. He does anything to get a woman he wants. He trades his wife for a mistress, and then once he tires and is ready to cast her from him, he betrays the mistress for another."

"Yet he returns tomorrow," said Artillery. "Somehow he'd know. If he found this out, he might kill you."

"Am I a fool that I do not know that's true? Women tire, my love, as well as men, but it is we who like to make the change. It is hard to be dropped like an overripe fruit."

"Still, you must go."

She half rose to bend over him, and the lightning flashed more faintly. "If you kiss me, I'll tell you a secret."

She lowered her lips, and for a second he forced himself to respond.

"You're strange," she remarked as she drew away.

"What is the secret?"

"The storm will last long. If I tell you and rid you of silly fears, may I stay?"

"Nothing can rid me of fear of Dan. I've seen him kill," he muttered.

"The secret is this," said Angela. "The man who loves me and casts me aside is the man I betray."

"You mean you know where he's gone?"

"Yes, I know where he's gone."

Artillery laughed. "Betrayal is weak, my love, unless there's something to betray. He has friends in Fernandina and the Cowford. The Spanish have tried for fifteen years to take him. Do you think they'll succeed tonight? Black Storm is old, but still the fastest in the province, and Dan the greatest scout alive."

"A swift horse and the knowledge of scouting are of little use in a woman's arms," said Angela bitterly. "He's meeting his pallid

Esther in the small Creek village just two leagues north of here. Captain Reduro suspects that the Creeks are harboring runaway slaves and that they possess contraband arms."

Her burning hands were touching his arms again.

"He has the quick discernment of the Spanish," said Artillery. "He will raid the village in a fortnight, no doubt?"

"He and his dragoons are raiding it now." He could feel the rise and fall of her breasts against him. "They left an hour ago."

His hand found the knife he had placed by the book of poems on the window sill. For the briefest instant he stroked its hilt with the tenderness he had used to touch her. Then his other hand closed in rage about her throat, tightening as though to strangle her, but instead sent her crashing backward to the floor.

Not stopping even for moccasins or pistols, he tore from the back of the house to the barn and was into the saddle. Black Cloud reared only once at a lightning flash, then straightened out her slender neck and was off through the solid sheets of rain. Wind had come, tossing and tearing wildly at the pinewoods branches above him as he went through the gates, carrying an arc of splashing water with him. In the tunnel of trees, a shower of soggy leaves mixed with the rain, sticking in patches on his back and shoulders, beating into his face and eyes. Black Cloud was almost part of him. She drove onward, with his urgency as a spur. He laid himself flat against the wet sleekness of her neck and gave her her head.

He took the King's Road. There was a shorter cut to the tiny Creek village, but it led through woods and a bayhead, and the open King's Road was quicker in such blackness. Reality left him with the constant beat of Black Cloud's hoofs and the stinging raindrops, heated by the September night until they felt uncomfortably warm. Colder sweat from himself and the mare mixed with them. He could stand apart and watch himself galloping fruitlessly nowhere in a cloud of living steam.

In the dark, he almost missed the trail that led from the King's Road to the village. He checked Black Cloud so sharply she had to rear. Moments later, the village was around him, with its smells and its filth and its yapping dogs. He shook a drunken chief awake, and babbled to him in English, Spanish, and Seminole.

Gradually, what he wanted to know filtered into the old Creek's foggy brain.

"Gone," he said, scratching, unmoved, and yawning. He pointed to a larger shack, the cleanest of the lot. "White squaw there."

Artillery found Esther, half-dressed and weeping. He waited

only long enough to hear that Reduro had pulled McKetch from out the bed an hour before and ridden off with his rain-soaked dragoons and their captive toward St. Augustine.

The rest of the night was never clear. He was on Black Cloud, galloping southward swifter than the shrieking wind. He was passing the scattered houses of Cowford, bringing lights to windows with the beat of his frantic speed. Checked by the broad expanse of the slowly moving St. John's River, he reined to a halt at a high place and stood staring across.

The rain was slackening. Distant streaks of lightning flashed palely, long enough to light four Spanish galleons anchored in midstream. Beyond the ships he saw the walls of the Spanish fort across the river.

Blackness came and the ships and the fort were gone. The rain came harder in a final fall.

"Dan—" he yelled. "Dan—"

Under him, Black Cloud shivered. His yell was whipped off eastward on the tail of the passing storm.

3

SHIMMERING HEAT WAS rising above the old King's Road, built by the English forty years before to link the British colonies scattered from New Smyra to the Georgia line. Since the Christmas Eve in 1787 when Artillery's father and mother had traveled it on their hopeless journey, it had fallen into disuse and disrepair. Still, with its cousin highway, the Spanish trail which connected St. Augustine and Pensacola, it was the best that the discouraging overland travel in the province had to offer. Other routes consisted of little more than footpaths or passable trails, and were known only to the Indians, the most experienced of scouts, and the oldest of settlers.

Since the night of Dan's capture two weeks before, the heat had persisted unremittingly. Shut in by bordering trees, the King's Road, just wide enough to allow the passage of two oxcarts, trebled its intensity. The rutted white sand reflected the sun, making the road a broiling chasm.

Since noon, Artillery had jogged along in silence, almost overcome by dejection. Beside him, on Savanna, Doctor Zeke had gradually succumbed to the same depression. The old man rode in listless

fashion, letting Savanna pick her own way, the usually tight reins hanging spiritlessly from his fingers. Some link in his life had broken, leaving his bearded chin sunk low on his chest.

The pace was slow, for in back of them a span of oxen pulling a loaded cart dumbly followed the horses; to keep the wheels in the sandy tracks required less effort than to stray.

Amy sat on the seat of the oxcart. She had always seemed ageless to Artillery, a part of his life as she was part of Dan's. In a fortnight, she had grown old. Maybe it was the harsh, cruel light of the sun, but he had never noticed before that her face was wrinkled and her shining hair more white than gray. Behind her in the wagon was a cedar chest, hand-hewn and polished by Dan McKetch.

The dragoons had seized the compound the morning after Dan's capture, taking possession in orderly fashion under command of the polished Don Jose. When questioned about Dan, the captain knew nothing, and took immediate refuge behind his mask of imperturbable Spanish courtesy. Governor Enrique White was a kindly man, and inclined to be clement, even with the enemies of Spain. He wanted nothing but the taxes or, in lieu of taxes, the property.

As to Amy's husband, Reduro insisted she must admit herself that for years he had proved most elusive. Captain Reduro was full of the sympathy befitting a grandee of excellent breeding. Senor McKetch might be hiding out somewhere. He might have found trouble over another pretty face and well-turned ankle. He might have— The captain expressed unutterable sorrow with a shrug and a soft, *"Quien sabe?"*

In the meantime, it was not the intention of Governor White to cause trouble for anyone. Senors Buckhart and Armes would be allowed to keep their horses and have two weeks to make plans for their departure. Strangely, Senor Ruiz Miranda and his so charming daughter, Angela, had departed during the rainy night.

The plantation would be parceled and sold, or ceded by His Most Catholic Majesty in land grants to those found worthy. Since it needed an overseer familiar with its operation, Melchor Salazar, an estimable Spaniard, had sought the post. Approved by the governor, he, his wife, and Damien had been given permission to stay.

Doctor Zeke's cooler head had calmed Artillery down by pointing out the futility of Artillery's first wild plans for ensnaring all of Reduro's dragoons, raising a force of Dan's ex-cohorts, and, together with Cheti Haiola's warriors, attacking St. Augustine.

The Spanish, Doctor Zeke pointed out, might be weak, but

they had never been accused of not being crafty. The Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine was one of the few Spanish strongholds which had never been taken. There was no way of telling if Dan was imprisoned there. The Spaniards moved slowly, but once they moved, it took time, strategy, and gold to find out what had happened to anyone so unfortunate as to become enmeshed in the spider web of the Spanish law.

Dan's life had been one of gambling and danger. If he had thrown the dice and lost, like General Bowles, he would want it that way. Let alone, he might escape. Meantime, he would prefer that his friends forget him and live their lives, knowing that he could help himself, as he always had, better than anyone.

It was Amy, tranquil and capable, and as always courageous, who really made their plans. Dan, aware for years of what might some day happen, had not left her penniless. She had relatives in South Carolina. There she would go. Doctor Zeke and Artillery must come with her, for Dan would wish it so.

Doctor Zeke agreed readily that Carolina was the proper place for a young man with a fortune in gold. For himself, he considered one place as good as another. It made little difference where he would die, so long as those he cared for were about him. With Dan gone, he was beginning to feel really old. He would find them passage on a ship in Fernandina, where he had many friends.

The cedar chest with her personal apparel, the feather mattress and patchwork quilt piled on top, and a few odd pieces of furniture, which filled the wagon, were allowed to Amy through the beneficence of the Spanish crown.

There had been a quick moment of sorrow in bidding farewell to Melchor Salazar, his wife, and Damien, who had waved goodbye at the compound gate the day before. They had camped overnight on the site of a long-abandoned English plantation where Artillery had found the remains of a ruined vat, still bearing bluish traces of indigo. For many years after the King's Road was built, indigo was one of the staple crops of Florida. The bushy shrubs, bearing both blue and white flowers, still grew in wild patches on the land of the abandoned plantation.

Amy told of watching the harvest as a girl when the plants in full bloom were cut with reaping hooks, immersed in water to ferment, and then treated with lime and churned until the mass precipitated in a fine blue powder. Pressed into bricks and dried, millions of such blocks were exported from the province. In those days, an indigo plantation was easily recognizable by its nauseous

smell. When the province was ceded to Spain, and the English bounty on indigo removed, gradually the commerce was replaced by cotton, easier to grow and more profitable.

They had gone on at dawn. Now, in the searing noontime heat, the smell of salt marsh was becoming stronger, and trees were thinning. Realization struck Artillery that it might be his very last day in Florida. Fernandina was drawing near. It couldn't be more than five good leagues away.

At least, Fernandina had a semblance of permanency. Artillery had begun to feel during the past few years that for all its beauty and prospects, the province was an ill-fated land, where nothing survived very long. He was growing impatient of change, beginning to long for a substantial country with a future which he might call home, some land of established quality, worth, and stability. The grandeur of Florida was all of the past—its plantations, its indigo crop, its single King's Road, rough and overgrown from lack of travel. Even the Indians—once powerful—were on the wane. He wanted to live, wanted great causes to tax his strength and sharpen his mind. Now Dan had gone; and the compound, like everything else, had joined the march of decay.

Yes, it was better that he leave, make himself part of the fledgling nation to the north. There was nothing left in the world he knew, except three small towns—Pensacola, Fernandina, and St. Augustine. They were merely names, not places he had actually seen. There must have been something durable about Fernandina. Even though it was still a little town, it had seen much change. He knew its history from the time that Jean Ribault, the French admiral, first sailed into the St. Marys River on May 3, 1562. Then, Amelia Island had been christened the Isle de Mai in honor of the month of its discovery, and the St. Marys River had been called the River Seine because, as the admiral put it, "it was broad as the Seine from Havre de Grace unto Honfleur."

More than a hundred years later, in 1686, the Spanish had selected Amelia Island as their military headquarters and given it the name of "Guale," a Spanish version of "quale" in the Indian tongue. Later still, the English adapted the name to "Wallie," and after that the Spaniards changed it to the Island Santa Maria.

The Spanish built San Fernando on the island in 1686, just a few years after the Castillo de San Marcos was built in St. Augustine. Thick marshes lay to the north and south, and the guns of the fort guarded the spacious harbor. Behind the guns, and between the marshes, there quickly grew up a little town. The only approach

was from the east, and there a gate and blockhouse were built to guard the settlement, which at that time was a Spanish mission, called by the priests "Santa Maria."

Artillery had reason for his interest in Fernandina, for it was there that Dan, shamed by America and deserted by England, had first turned to banditry as a career. The British settlers, driven out by the ceding of Florida to Spain under the Treaty of Paris, had selected Amelia Island as a point of embarkation to the Bahamas, West Indies, Nova Scotia, and England. For almost a year, long lines of wagon trains trekked to the island, and tented colonies, with their cattle, slaves, harvests of crops, and even naval stores, extended for miles around the Amelia settlement. Dan had raided them unchecked, even though two troops of Spanish horsemen were designated to stop his depredations.

All the British settlers were not evacuated before November, 1785, when two transports sailed for England with Governor Tonyn, his officers, and their families. No money had been available for two whole years, as the attempted sale of property had glutted the market. Two hundred Florida refugees who arrived in Nova Scotia were described by Governor Parr of that province as "miserable wretches, naked, destitute, and without a shilling."

Yet Dan, raiding in wrath, and taking only material things, had thrived and survived.

For what?

Thinking of it, Artillery wasn't sure. To save Artillery Armes, perhaps, and to end his own life in the dungeons of Spain?

Well, all that was long ago. He wanted to see Fernandina and the old Fort San Fernando, which gave the town its name. Of course, like everything else in Florida, the change of years had struck it too, and the fort was called San Carlos now. It was under command of Don Justo Lopez, the local Spanish commandant.

He looked around him in surprise. The air was a little cooler. The trees had vanished, and they were traveling over endless swampland with a narrow shell-bedded wagon trail. Doctor Zeke had moved ahead, picking the way with the sure-footed Savanna.

Artillery turned to speak to Amy. He found her asleep, lying half down on the wagon seat, her bonnet shielding her face from the sun.

Yes, he wanted to see Fernandina, but not for long. Another road, wider and more adventuresome, lay before him. Once he climbed up the ladder of a coaster in the harbor, his life would have really begun.

The trail across the marsh ran aimlessly, but with a purpose. Narrow creeks of brackish water lay on either side, flowing sluggishly eastward to join the Amelia River. Through this network the road pressed on, twisting and turning, but always bearing eastward. Their progress was marked by clouds of birds, rising on either side of the trail—herons, cranes, fishing eagles, and smaller ones, beating the grass with flapping wings, soaring to circle in behind them, screaming raucously, filling the air with noise and spots of varied hue.

Across the marsh, tree-studded higher land could be seen more clearly. Doctor Zeke pointed, and said, without turning, "Amelia Island. We'll reach the ferry soon."

Black Cloud stepped sideways skittishly.

A narrow stream ran close by the road. Piled like logs in a small canoe lay five sleeping tatterdemalion Indians.

Doctor Zeke turned, looking more cheerful than he had all day. "The wages of sin." He pointed to the canoe and its cargo. "They pour into Fernandina to trade, then look too long on the rum. When they are thoroughly drunk, the estimable citizens load them in, as you see them here, and set them adrift."

"Doesn't anything ever happen to them?" Artillery asked.

"Occasionally some are swept out to sea, but most of them end up here in the marsh and sleep it off." The doctor shook with a silent chuckle. "It's hard to kill an Indian by filling him full of rum, but I'll have to speak to the governor. Loading five in a single canoe is against the law. The limit is three."

A colony of alligators slid from the road with a splash, the largest of them scarcely two feet long. Some were no bigger than lizards. They moved off, rippling the shallow water as they swam away swiftly toward safety in some nearby lagoon. In back of them trailed a moccasin, larger than any of the gators and thick as Artillery's arm.

The road grew rougher, and the oxcart jounced as the wheels dropped into narrow slots.

Amy woke up, and called, "Where are we now?"

"Nearing the ferry," said Doctor Zeke. "The land ahead is Amelia Island."

"Is Fernandina far?"

"A few miles north of where we land. We'll be there late this afternoon."

An hour later, the road ran out, and they halted in front of a narrow expanse of shining water, which widened to the north.

Artillery thrilled at the sight of a three-masted square-rigger anchored in the stream.

Doctor Zeke fired his heavy pistol, reloaded, and fired again. After a while, there was an answering shot from the opposite shore, and a boat put out. As it drew in nearer, Artillery saw it was a clumsy barge, manned by four blacks, who handled the heavy sweeps. It grounded in front of the ruts, and a rotund Spaniard, sweating profusely, leaped ashore and gave the doctor greeting.

"*Hola,* Senor Buckhart! It has been many weeks, nay months, since you have patronized my ferry." He squinted at the oxcart and then at Artillery. "I trust that nothing untimely brings you to Fernandina now."

Doctor Zeke made acknowledgment, and introduced Artillery and Amy. "Senor Mateo Ferradas, a citizen of Fernandina. I thought you, of all people, might know what has happened, senor. You hear much because you meet many travelers. Our plantation has been seized by one Don Jose de Reduro, aide to Governor Enrique White."

"And Senor McKetch?" Ferradas looked grave.

"We believe him imprisoned. In reply to our questions, Don Reduro has nothing but '*Quien sabe*?' for an answer."

"Then I fear," said Ferradas, "that your supposition may be so. It is the way of the military in St. Augustine. Here in Fernandina, His Excellency, Don Justo Lopez, is in closer touch with the outside world. I will make inquiries. The mail boat lands tomorrow from St. Augustine. Her captain hears much. Perhaps he will know. In the meantime—" He looked again at the oxcart. "You seem prepared for an extended journey." He became a shrewd trader in an instant. "Perhaps I could interest you in settling in Fernandina. There's desirable property there, and it's a growing town."

"It's been growing too long," said Doctor Zeke. "We seek only a ship to take us to Charleston."

Ferradas shrugged philosophically. "That is easily found if you have the gold. Should you change your mind, a hundred pesos will buy you an adequate plot in Fernandina. Meantime—" He waved toward the ferry, where two of the slaves had placed planks ashore. "I can accommodate the cart and oxen, but the horses must swim."

Artillery and Doctor Zeke unsaddled, and half an hour later Savanna and Black Cloud had scrambled up the sandy bank on the opposite shore.

The rest of the trip was pleasant, for they found some shade riding by the great plantation which was part of the grant con-

ferred by the Spanish on Don Domingo Fernandez. Doctor Zeke told Artillery and Amy that Don Fernandez was an astronomer, and spent a large part of his time star-gazing from a little summerhouse on his plantation. His wife did most of the management wisely and well, and had set out large orange groves, which Artillery saw to the left, shining through the moss-hung thickets of cedar, oak, and bay.

By the time they had reached the Bosquebello Cemetery, gloomy and majestic with its grove of festooned oaks and gnarled cedars swaying in continuous breeze from the sea, the sun was nearly down. The city gates and blockhouse lay before them.

A sentry stopped them with a sharp, "*Quien vive?*"

Doctor Buckhart gave their names and said, "Visitors to see His Excellency, Don Justo Lopez, for the purpose of embarking"—an explanation which became satisfactory when a piece of gold changed hands.

An under officer was summoned. He was fat, official, and bored, but nevertheless greeted them with courtesy. Mounted on a horse as white as his uniform, he led the way through the gates a short distance down the Calle de Las Puertas de la Ciudad, and made a sharp left around a large garden where two other soldiers were busy hoeing. Next to the garden, the sandy, tree-lined street, which Artillery afterwards found to be the Calle Somerualos, skirted a marsh for a distance. Beyond the marsh, a few houses lined the street on both sides.

Suddenly, they rode out into a square, and the fort, shaped like half a star, was right ahead, its guns commanding more marsh and the towering masts of half a dozen brigs lying just beyond in the harbor. On the left of the square was a church, and beside it a comfortable frame house with a long piazza.

On the piazza, a gray-haired man with a pleasant face and snapping dark eyes lay stretched in a hammock, wielding a fan. At sight of Doctor Buckhart and the guiding officer, he rose and reached hastily for a uniform jacket on the back of a chair. When the jacket was correctly buttoned, he stepped from the piazza, listened to the officer's explanation, and then bowed with great formality to Amy.

That done, he turned to Doctor Zeke, and said, "So you visit us once more, Senor Doctor? Strange. I scarcely expected to see you again. Rumors have reached me that the Castillo McKetch has fallen. You are most hardy, senor. You and this young man who sits his horse so well, and the senora."

"We come seeking passage to Charleston, Don Justo," said Buckhart firmly.

"*Si.*" The commandant stroked his gray mustache and touched his wisp of beard with a finger. "Has it not occurred to you, Senor Doctor, that you and all those with you might not sail from Fernandina northward, but that you might sail southward—and not in a cabin, but loaded down with chains, as befits the ancient enemies of Spain?"

"No, *amigo*," said Doctor Zeke. "It has only occurred to me that pay for the Spanish garrisons in Florida is long overdue from Mexico, and that such things might be remedied—at least, in part—by a friend, but never by an enemy of Spain."

Don Justo's eyes glittered. "If you mean you have gold with you, senor, again are you not brave and hardy? Gold found on prisoners can be confiscated for the crown."

"Do I thrust my beard in the lion's mouth?" asked Doctor Zeke. "I have gold with me, true. But only a tenth of that which I know to be hidden in the care of a friend."

Don Justo laughed suddenly, and the fat officer on the white horse looked astonished. "There is something about friendship which I admire, Senor Doctor, and equally something about cleverness and bravery which I love. Perhaps that's the reason that for many years I have been a friend to both McKetch and you."

4

THE TOPSAIL COASTING schooner, *Blue Dolphin*, under command of Captain Ephraim Shanks, was to sail at dawn.

Once Commandant Don Justo Lopez was convinced that a course of action would prove monetarily beneficial to himself and the Spanish crown, events moved with dispatch in Fernandina. The oxen and cart had been readily sold to the commandant himself at a price approaching nearly half their value. The commandant had then regarded Savanna and Black Cloud with a glint of cupidity in his appraising eye.

"Where we go, they go, too," said Doctor Zeke.

Don Justo said, "My offer would be fair, though one is old. Captain Shank's ship is already crowded, and the passage money may be heavy. There are other mounts to be had in Charleston, *amigos*."

"Yet none so good as these," said Doctor Zeke. "Neither in Charleston, Boston, or elsewhere. They go!"

Don Justo moved his shoulders and turned away. "I'll see what can be done. This love of an animal is an English trait I find difficult to understand."

"And difficult to overtake as well," Doctor Zeke reminded him. "At least one Spanish officer is well mounted somewhere, since the sire of the black colt here has fallen into your hands. I trust whoever gets Dan's horse, Black Storm, attempts to lead no charge with the St. Augustine dragoons. He will find it embarrassing, don't you think, to arrive at the scene of battle all alone?"

"Save your mind from unnecessary worry, Senor Doctor. No officer in St. Augustine, Pensacola, or here will ever see Black Storm. Everything of value is shipped to Cuba, or perhaps to Mexico."

So the horses, together with Amy's luggage, had been lightered out to the *Blue Dolphin* and loaded on.

Don Justo was rowed out with Artillery, Amy, and Doctor Zeke in a longboat, and went up the ladder first, with Amy following.

Captain Shanks was a wrinkle-faced, weather-tanned New Englander, with hard blue eyes and a head as bald as one of his capstans. When his passengers were all on board, he showed bad teeth around his pipestem in a grin, and led Doctor Zeke and Don Justo off to his cabin, sending Artillery and Amy to their narrow staterooms in charge of a whip-scarred black with an evil eye.

The schooner was spotless, but below, it smelled strongly of turpentine, tar, and rum.

Artillery dumped his saddle and bags in the upper of the narrow bunks, and stood staring at them when the black had gone. He had clung to them tightly since Black Cloud was unsaddled, and now it was a physical relief to be rid of them for a moment. Gold was precious and desirable, but it weighted you. There were two hundred doubloons in each of the saddlebags, and the lot weighed over thirty pounds. He carried another hundred strapped tight around his waist in a money belt made by Amy.

He hadn't liked the looks of the black who showed him to his cabin. If the crew got wind of such a fortune on board, he had a misgiving that his life, and Amy's and Doctor Zeke's wouldn't be worth a farthing.

He placed his pistol, knife, and tomahawk beside the saddlebags in a dangerous array, then stood his rifle and rapier in the

corner by the bunk. It seemed he could never escape this need for weapons and the implied force behind them. Nothing was your own unless you were strong enough to hold it. He had heard General Bowles say that years before. "Unless he protects it with guns and cannon, he buys it only to have it immediately whisked away."

Was there safety where he was going? Could a man rear children and cattle, and love and grow old, and tend his farm? Or was he doomed to sleep forever with one arm about a lass and the other about a rifle? He had scarcely set foot on an American ship before he was worried about losing his treasure. Less than an hour before, his worry had been that he would lose it to the subtle minions of Spain.

He stripped half way, and was washing when Doctor Zeke came in.

"I've arranged the passage, and the captain has asked us to dine in his cabin with Don Justo." The doctor sat down on a three-legged stool.

"What was the cost?" Artillery wiped water from his eyes and smoothed back his hair. "The gold you gave me is there in my saddlebags. I want to stand my share."

"When I need it, I'll ask," said Doctor Zeke.

"It's high time our accounts were cast. You've fed me, and housed me, and taught me, you and Dan. What gold I have, you gave me. From this time on, it's right that I pay my share."

"I've given you nothing," said Doctor Zeke. "The gold was yours by the right of your father. You became mine by right of God. You've grown till you're strong and fair and brave. You've worked and learned. God willing, you're a man of heart, with some thoughts in your head. I'm older than you know, lad, and Amy, too. Were you not here, and what you are, the going of Dan would be doubly bitter. Let's say, from that, you've paid us double your share."

Artillery found he couldn't answer.

Doctor Zeke got up and left the cabin. Artillery heard his footsteps as he went down the passage toward Amy's stateroom. There was a hail from above, and the sound of feet on deck. The *Blue Dolphin* swung slowly in a change of the tide and was silent except for the creaking of a spar.

Doctor Zeke came back with clothes on his arm. He laid them out on the edge of the bunk and handed a shirt to Artillery. It was made of the purest, whitest linen, with lace at the cuffs and a cascade of ruffles down the front.

"Amy made this for you," the doctor said. "Put it on."

Artillery slid into the garment, relishing the soft cleanliness against his skin.

It was growing dark in the cabin. The doctor lit a hanging oil lamp and pulled up the wick. He handed Artillery a coat of blue. "It's something you've always wanted, lad."

Artillery slipped it on. On the front were six silver buttons.

Doctor Buckhart stared for an instant, then handed Artillery a hat with a sweeping plume. "It's a dress that's been long remembered, both for the good and the bad that it's done. If you wear it with a prayer in your heart, you may wipe out the bad. God willing, it'll carry you very far."

A mirror, splotched and wavery, hung above the basin. Artillery stood before it, staring at his own tan face which peered back at him with an unfamiliar leer. His lips were distorted, his blue eyes squinty, his firm, straight nose with its tiny bridge of freckles somehow awry. His yellow hair was hidden beneath the jaunty hat with its dashing plume.

It was his first awareness of what clothes could do, and of the powerful force of habit. A pleasant subservience to Dan's skill and bravery had begun as a child in Artillery, and had since become habitual to him. For years, Dan's finery had been as symbolic of strength and authority as the gaudiness of a high-ranking officer's uniform.

Doctor Zeke and Amy had given him more than a fine blue coat with silver buttons. They had in an instant made him mature. A cloak of bravery, daring, power, and responsibility had fallen about his shoulders and entered into his heart and soul the moment that the material trappings were donned. Dan might be gone, but his kingdom with its weight and cares had been passed on.

Artillery was cured of awkwardness and self-consciousness among men forever. Despite his fine clothes, inside he knew that with women he would never find Dan's freedom. Amy, he loved as his mother. Angela had fired him, but cooled him into the hardness of metal by her cruel betrayal of Dan. He must always be gentle with women, and a little afraid, for his mind would forever hold the thought of the terrible raid on Drummond's camp and the screams of the tortured girl. Yes, he would always be gentle—

The banging of a gong announced dinner in the captain's cabin.

The table was piled high with large blue crabs, boiled and allowed to cool, but Artillery found his appetite was gone. He ate a few, washing them down with Captain Shanks' passable ale.

The captain was a good and continuous talker, and carried on a running line of commentary, undeterred by the fact that most of the time his mouth was full. Artillery watched in amazement as the bald-headed mariner cracked the crabs against a stone, sucked them clean, and brushed the shells onto the floor to be gathered up by a grinning black cabin boy.

Shanks told of being in England in 1803, and shipping out just before the renewal of the French and English war. He expounded on the transfer of Louisiana to the United States, his meeting with William Claiborne and General Wilkinson, and the foresight of Thomas Jefferson. He told of more recent news—Napoleon's proclamation of himself as Emperor of France, and the killing of Alexander Hamilton by Vice-President Aaron Burr in a duel the year before.

"Troublous times, these be." Shanks removed crab meat from his teeth with a dirty fingernail. "There's talk right now of a French and Spanish fleet that may blister England's bottom. What think you, *Excelencia?*"

Commandant Lopez said cagily, "I think as any loyal officer of Spain."

"And I think your country's found a strange bedfellow," Shanks told him. "This pot-bellied pretender's becoming too fat for a single bed, *amigo.* There was a day, long past, when French warships anchored in the St. Marys. Would you have the same fondness for this royal French bastard if the St. Marys name was changed once again to the River Seine? We may see the day."

"God protects those who worship Him," said Don Justo. "Spain will always be Spain."

" 'Tis well to have faith in your church when you have but ten men to man a fortress the size of Fernandina." Doctor Buckhart sought something to wipe his fingers on, and finally used his beard.

"I have loyal citizens as well." Don Justo grew haughty.

"A fine quality," Doctor Buckhart agreed. "It is to be regretted that a hundred citizens, brimful of loyalty, are scarcely a match against one mercenary artilleryman who can drop a round shot into a warship's magazine."

"Hear, hear!" said Shanks. "A blunderbuss is more effective than a six-pounder with no gunner to sight it. I've seen loyal citizens become panicky citizens when stood behind a cannon with a glowing match." Shanks passed a wink to Doctor Zeke, and called the cabin boy to bring rum.

The cabin grew stifling and strong with the smell of crabs and

burning oil from the swivel lamp. Artillery suddenly felt walled in, depressed because the talk had turned again to guns and war. He got up, saying he must go below to look to the horses, and left.

Both mares whinnied a greeting, and for a while he stood between them, rested by the familiar smell in the narrow stall. He saw they had oats and water, and went on deck again to join Amy, who was standing by the rail.

The night was bright, and the town looked bigger under the stars than it had by day. A breeze swept across Amelia Island from the ocean, bearing with it the mingled smell of trees and flowers and the odors of drying fish, stacked-up lumber, hemp and rum, turpentine and tar. Cooking fires dotted the tree-lined streets, and through the tangle of trailing moss a hundred candles flickered slyly.

Extending out from the hard star-shaped battlements of Fort San Carlos, three wharves, built to receive the goods of Hibberson and Yonge, John Forbes and Company, and Sibbald and Bethune, made wide black paths over the level marsh. A fire burned on the end of one, where some Negroes were roasting fish. Their shadows danced against the stacked-up lumber, which lined the dock almost to the shore.

From the captain's cabin in back of Artillery, Shanks' voice grew loud in a bawdy tale. Glasses clinked as the cabin boy served rum.

Somewhere ashore, a woman laughed shrilly. Music started, and voices were raised in song. With the music, Fernandina became the compound again, sweet with Damien's singing. It was Cheti Haiola's village, filled with the roaring fire and the rattle of the dancers. Bowles was there, proclaiming himself an uncrowned king. Any minute a giant black stallion would gallop down the length of the wharf, scatter the Negroes about the fire, and leap three lengths out into the stream. The yell, "Christ's blood!" would split the air again, and that hat with the sweeping plume would come swarming up the ladder.

"You love it, don't you?" said Amy. She had always been like that, watching him for long without speaking and then cutting into his most innermost thoughts when he hadn't a word to say.

"I don't feel right—"

"Leaving Dan?"

He nodded. "Not knowing where he is, I guess. If anything happened to you or Doctor Zeke or me, he wouldn't leave—not until he knew it was hopeless. Would he, Amy?"

"No," she said. "But this is hopeless."

"You've heard, then?"

"Nothing."

"Then how do you know, Amy?" Artillery was pleading from his heart. "He may be in the dungeons of St. Augustine. I could get men to help me—Salazar, Cheti Haiola. Doctor Zeke knows fifty more. How do you know it's hopeless?"

"Because I've heard nothing." She put her hand on his arm. "I've lived with him longer than you, lad. He's come and gone through the years, but we've had a code—a strange thing, if you like—but no matter where he's been, or what he's done, I've had a message from him every third day. An Indian, or one of his own men, maybe badly needed, has found me to tell me he was free and living. I've promised him that the day that message didn't come was the day I'd know his course was run. It's been two weeks now."

"Then you think he's dead?"

"Or taken to Havana to Morro Castle."

"I could find out if I stay."

She squeezed his hand. "You could find out nothing, lad. You're a hothead and young, and due to us, in Florida you're an outlaw. It's only through Ezekiel's guile and wiseness that we boarded this ship today. Don Justo trusts him as he trusts few men, because Ezekiel's word is better than most men's bond. He's left gold buried near the compound. Salazar knows the spot. Once we sail unmolested, Don Justo will send his messenger with a letter from Ezekiel and collect his pay."

"But I might find out something," he persisted.

Again she shook her head. "They'd only arrest you if you linger."

"I have gold."

"So had Dan. We can enter the United States and live there in peace as citizens, because our papers will be cleared by Don Justo. He has power as the commandant of Fernandina, but not power enough to let us live on here as citizens of Spain."

There were a thousand things he wanted to say—memories of childhood, welling up inside of him to choke him—the times she had wiped his tears away, protected him from Doctor Zeke's caning, helped him with his lessons, and fed him cookies, bound his cuts, or kissed a bruise on his grimy knee. All he could do was seize her hand in both his own.

"The doubloons are in my saddlebags, Amy. Lock them in your chest when you go below."

"Where are you going?" She clung to his hand.

"To make a last try for information. We sail at dawn. What can't be heard by my wits may be bought. I'm going ashore."

"You'll return for sailing?"

"You have my word."

"You're armed?"

He freed his hand and held back the blue coat to show the knife and pistol and the tomahawk which he always wore.

"Then go," she said, and held him tight for an instant, and kissed him full, as a mother might kiss her son. "And be careful."

He laughed in reassurance as he climbed the rail and started down the ladder to the rowboat that lay moored below. "I'm always careful."

He thought he heard her whisper, "A bullet's swifter," but he wasn't sure.

He beached the boat, tossed a peso to the aiding black from the dock and said, "Row it out. Moor it to the *Blue Dolphin's* ladder, and swim ashore."

The black looked puzzled until the order was repeated in Spanish. Then he jumped in hurriedly and shoved away.

Artillery skirted the lumber piles, kegs, and coils of hawser, and walked up into the town. Music came from the Place de la Constitucion in front of the fort, where three men with guitars were singing, and half a dozen couples were waltzing around a fire built in the square. He looked at the church and the governor's house with its stately trees, and finally circled the square. People stared at him curiously, but no one spoke.

On the other side of the fort, a faded board sign showed he was back on the Calle de la Marina again. There were warehouses there, redolent of rum and rope and pine. He walked a ways and turned right, where another board said Calle San Fernando. The trees shut out the stars, and the light was cut off from the fire in the square. He stopped to accustom his eyes to the darkness.

The music in the square was silenced.

Near to where he was standing, Artillery heard the sound of weeping, and a moment later, someone moaned. It came from a warehouse close by him. He walked around the corner of the warehouse, and saw dim light in a single window, heavily barred as though for a jail.

"*Hola, amigos,*" he said softly. "What goes on in there?"

The moaning ceased, and everything was quiet.

He stepped up closer and peered through the window, and his stomach retched at the smell. A single candle, guttering in a bottle, gave enough light to show him fourteen black wretches, men and women, chained and naked, lying on the floor. He spoke in English, French, and Spanish, asking if he could bring them food, but got no answer, except the whitened stare of frightened eyes.

He turned away, too sick to bear more. He was in the port of black ivory. He remembered the slaves in Drummond's camp, and thought that at least they were out in the open.

As Artillery reached the sandy street, a figure stepped from behind a tree, and said, "*Quien vive?*"

"A friend." Artillery's hand was on his knife.

"You seek strange places, *amigo.*"

The man was naked to the waist, and towered high above him, a creature of massive muscles. Gold rings hung pendent from his ears, and a handkerchief was knotted about his hair.

"I find strange things in such places," Artillery told him. "Are you so afraid of the blacks you sell, you must weaken them by lack of food and air?"

"How now!" The man began to laugh. "What a spouting speech from foppish scum! Senor Kingsley will be much amused. Meantime, I'll twist your buttons off, and cut a lock of that yellow hair."

He made a move for the dirk at his waist, but Artillery's knife was already there, the point touching the corded muscles of the belly.

"By Our Sacred Lady, Geronimo, you fool! You're courting death!" A mumbling voice came from beside the Spaniard.

Artillery moved his eyes enough to see a hunching, toothless Negress, who had materialized from nowhere.

"Be gone, Felipa, you titless she-cow of a witch!" the big man roared.

The Negress spat on his foot. "Dung-of-a-dog, that's Dan McKetch!"

Geronimo stepped back. "You lie—you whining, eyeless ape!"

The old woman peered closer. "Or McKetch's ghost!"

Geronimo turned on her threateningly, but she didn't move. Instead, she spat on his foot again.

"Touch me, dog-dung, and I'll spit in your face instead of your feet, and leave my curse sores rotting there. There's but one coat and such a hat in the province. If 'tis not McKetch, the one who wears it must have the right, or he'd never dare. Walk into his

knife if you think I lie, and I'll cook your guts into chitlings, and dry them out for love charms to put in a lady's hair!"

Geronimo moved off toward the warehouse, mumbling, "We'll meet again, *amigo.*"

"It's to be hoped," said Artillery, "and I'll light a candle for you."

Felipa touched his coat with a clawlike hand, and whispered, "Come, Senor Armes. You can do no good with idle words. You cause but more trouble for those in chains."

Artillery stopped short, his knife still ready. "How do you know my name, old one?"

The Negress cackled, and tugged him forward. "I am Felipa, the witch. I know all that happens, before and after, and how to get food and air to those in chains."

Artillery seized her roughly by her scrawny arm. "What do you know of those in chains?"

"Nothing of the one you seek." She cackled again. "But I know of one who does."

"You know about Dan?" He twisted her arm.

"Gently, gently, senor," she whined. "I am not friendly to those who cause me pain."

"Speak, you driveling fool!"

They had moved until they were standing in the light of a house, with candles in the window.

The slattern paused and gave him a foxy, sideways glance. "I'm a poor woman, senor. Would you pay to have word of him whose coat you wear?"

"I'll pay for service," said Artillery. He handed her a peso, which disappeared in her ragged dress. "I also pay for cheating. If you've lied, be assured you'll meet with me again."

She shuffled off, with him following, passed two streets, and stopped at the corner of a third. "This is the Calle del Comandante." she said, and pointed left down the tunnel of overhanging branches. "Go here, and the next you cross is the Paseo de las Damas, where love can be bought for money."

"I want no love, you driveling fool!"

She cackled again. "'Twould be easy for you to find, *hombre,* though you had no money. Walk down the length of the Paseo de las Damas and back again. Then seek me if I lie."

She shuffled off swiftly.

The houses on the Paseo de las Damas were set farther apart and farther back in their shelter of trees. Some were bright with

candles and others darkened. Artillery passed them all until the marsh lay flat before him, then turned and started back again.

He was under a spreading live oak tree when a woman spoke from out the darkness.

"B'soir, monsieur."

"M'am'selle."

The voice had checked him, taken him back. It was soft and sad, and tired and warm.

"You forget old friends," it went on in French. She had stepped from under the shadow of the tree. The stars struck bright on her still, smooth shoulders rising from her low-cut gown. "Are you still the lad, Artillery, who liked the gun my father made, and who liked to play chess with me—or is he gone?"

"Celine! Celine Lemain!" She was in his arms. He was holding her tight. "For you, he'll never be gone."

5

A SANDY WALK bordered by conch shells led to the house, which stood secluded from the Paseo de las Damas by a screen of trees. Celine took his arm, and they walked up the path together, but she put a finger on his lips as they neared the door.

Inside, Artillery could see a large room, bright with six smoking Betty lamps hung in a cluster from the ceiling. Five men, intent on cards, sat at a table. Two wore the white Spanish uniform. A third, bulbous-nosed and piggy-eyed, with his queued hair tied at the nape of his neck, wore a white shirt, rich with embroidery. As Artillery watched, he threw down his hand and swore lustily in German. One of the soldiers scooped in money from the table and toasted his luck in a swallow of rum.

A Negro with a fine high forehead, intelligent eyes, and an aquiline nose sat beside the German. The cut of his pearl-gray coat and the shimmering silk of his ruffled stock proclaimed him a man of importance in Fernandina.

It was the fifth player who had instantly caught Artillery's interest. His brushed-back thick, black hair came to a widow's peak near the center of his forehead, and thick, black eyebrows met above his long hooknose. His eyes were black, deep-set, and flinty. His sunburned face, slightly cadaverous, narrowed down to a pointed chin goatee, which gave the whole a Mephistophelean ap-

pearance. The man had very broad shoulders and, in spite of the heat, wore a black broadcloth coat as severe as one of Doctor Buckhart's.

It was the waistcoat that had first caught Artillery's eye. Cut very low to reveal a soft, white shirt with a wide wing collar, open at the neck, the vest was of the creamiest white satin. Fastening it, three black pearl buttons shone in a nest of heavily embroidered red rosebuds, complete with the greenest of leaves and stems. Protruding handily from between waistcoat and shirt, was the silver-mounted butt of a pistol.

At the German's cursing, the man showed strong, wide-spaced white teeth in a wolfish grin.

"Who is he?" Artillery whispered. "The one with the flowers."

"*Chut!*" Celine took his hand and led him around the house to a door at the rear.

They went into a comfortably furnished bedroom. A candle burned steadily at each end of the polished dresser. The hurricane globes shielding the flames were chased in an intricate design. Celine took one of the candles and lighted more in a silver candelabra, resurrecting memories, one by one, as each newly ignited wick flickered and then burned strong. The ivory chessmen on the table snapped to attention in their endless drill. The polished posts of the old bed glowed again.

He watched her move until the candle was replaced inside its globe on the dresser, and was conscious that she had always brought to his nostrils the sweetness of her lingering perfume. Yet it wasn't the same as at Dan's. There were things in the room that were new—bijoux, glittering on the dresser; a Buddha, carved from ivory; a mantilla, draped across a chair; on the wall, the opened delicateness of a lacy Spanish fan. He looked at her closer, noting the redness of her lips, which couldn't be real, and the heavy white powder on her arms and shoulders.

He could stand it no longer. He burst out impatiently, "Are Jacques and your mother here?"

She turned as though he had struck her, letting brandy she was pouring overflow in the glass, the heavy decanter trembling in her hand. When the glasses were filled, she wiped away the wet spot on the table, handed him a glass, and crossed herself swiftly.

"*Bonne santé!*"

He drank with her, gulping all the fiery liquor.

"I'm nervous, *cheri*," she told him. "I sent old Felipa out to find you as soon as I heard you were in Fernandina. You come like

a ghost from the ages gone, in that coat of blue and those ruffles. Come here—closer."

She moved him near to the candelabra, then lifted it high so the light might strike him full. "Closer, *cheri.* Look into my eyes. You come here asking for Jacques and my mother. I must see for myself if you mock me, or if it's still a child that Felipa, the witch, has found."

She stared for a full long minute, and in the brightness he saw her wrinkled eyes and the lines at her mouth.

She reached up and smoothed back his yellow hair, then laughed. "*Parbleu!* We French are always gay. Mother's been dead for five years now. It's been six since Jacques was sent to Morro Castle." Her voice grew harsh with a rasp like Dan's. "'Christ's blood, woman! Can't we have some wine—some love—some laughter?'" She pointed to a chair. "Sit you down."

She put the candelabra back on the table, poured more brandy, then settled herself on the floor beside him, her wide skirts rustling. "Drink," she said, "to the spawn of bandits—you and me."

The brandy burned his throat again, and settled hot in his stomach. The chessmen shone brighter, as though washed clean.

"Are you a fool?" She set her glass on the floor and seized him roughly by the knee. Tears had filled her eyes. "Have you never loved? Have you no more feeling than that golden hatchet that hangs at your waist—that blade that was made to cut and kill? Are you granite inside, like that bearded prophet who reared you? What happens to a maid in this province, alone—a maid who's belonged to Dan McKetch? Holy Mother! You know what I am. Have some pity on me."

He covered her frenzied hands with his own, and the touch seemed to calm her. "*Celine, cherie.* I don't know what you mean." There were tears in his own eyes, too. "There have only been two women in all my life—you and Amy—who live for me."

"God bless you," she said, and got up suddenly to stand at the mirror and repair the traces the tears had made in her powder. "You speak Spanish as well as I do." She spoke without turning around, watching herself in the mirror. "The Paseo de las Damas means one thing—the street of the women, like the Calle de la Marina, which means the street of the sea. So long as you have the gold to pay, both are free. The street of the women who've sold their souls! I am one of them, Artillery, and day and night I beat myself—harder than my father ever beat me. I've bedded anyone who's paid—from the blackest of blacks to the commandant of the

town. *Parbleu!* I am Celine the Smart! Now I have more and younger girls, who share their gold, but not their lovers, with me. Now say your say!"

"You're good," he told her steadily.

She turned, leaning against the dresser, framed by the candles. "And you," she said, "have been given by God a heart with a power really to punish. I could stand it if you cursed me."

"I have seen betrayal," Artillery said. "A woman who betrays is a woman I'd kill. But you are good. There is nothing you could do or become that would ever change you. You'll always be Celine to me."

"You're right, *peut-être,* for my love for Dan has never changed." She walked to the table and poured more brandy. "You were brought here tonight to meet the only man in the province who can tell us what's happened to Dan. He's the man at play in the other room—the one whose name you asked of me."

"Who is he?"

"He would talk with you before you know."

"What's his price?"

"It's not gold," she said, "which means it's something greater. He'll name it not even to me."

"Shall I speak?"

"Wait to be spoken to." She took his hand and led him into a darkened passage. He heard music and a burst of song.

A door swung open, and he was gazing into the smoke-filled room he had seen from outside. Others had come. A swarthy half-breed lounged in one corner, plunking a beribboned guitar. Stamping out a measure with a shapely, dark-eyed Spanish girl was Geronimo, who had stopped him by the warehouse. The girl's light dress was shoulderless and so thin, each step showed every curve of her supple body. A flaming red mantilla draped itself over her shoulders from her high-backed comb.

Across the room, singing to the music, sat a grizzle-haired man in mariner's clothes with a captain's jacket. He was waving time with a half-filled flagon of rum to the imminent danger of a full-breasted blonde girl perched on his knee. Her dress was as thin as the Spanish girl's, but she wore no mantilla, and a rose, stuck in her ash-colored hair, replaced the comb.

The game was still going on, enlarged by another player. The newcomer's back was toward Artillery. Staring at the snow-white hair, so carefully groomed above the broadcloth shoulders, Artillery

fought a desire to flee. He seized Celine by the arm and whispered "Doctor Zeke. What's he doing here?"

"Why not?" she asked softly. "He's been here many times before."

"And Dan?"

"Of course." She gave a curious smile. "To become well established on the Paseo de las Damas, Artillery, takes gold. When Dan found me here after my parents were gone, I had no gold."

Artillery took his hand from her arm. The fumes of the brandy were touching his brain, and he suddenly felt old. On this, his last night in Florida, like Felipa, the witch, he was endowed with sight to see the past and look at the future. The feeling of age made him bold. Celine, who was sweet and pure, had been bought. The Spanish girl was firing him with her dancing. He wanted her. Everything in life was for sale. Coins were clinking in his pockets, and the belt at his waist was heavy from the hundred pieces of gold.

"Who is the one in the red mantilla, Celine?"

"Ysabelle. She is lovely, *non?*" In the shadow of the doorway, she was watching him, still wearing her curious smile.

"And the others?" He covered his interest in Ysabelle with a question. "There are none I know, except Geronimo. He stopped me on the way here, when I was looking in the warehouse where he keeps his slaves."

"So? He is dangerous, *mon vieux.* It is Margot who sits on the captain's knee. He is Ledoux, the master of a trader from Havre. The black at the table is George Jacobo. He owns a plantation down the island, one of the best houses in town, and has many slaves—a good man to know. The rest—*pouf! Il n'y a rien.*"

Artillery started forward, saying, "Come."

"*Non.*" She stopped him. "I do not mix. I have word you sail at dawn."

"That's true."

"After you've talked to the man at the table, see me, and bring Doctor Zeke. I want word of Dan, if you get it."

She went swiftly back down the passage.

Artillery stepped into the smoky room and closed the door behind him. The slight breeze from the ocean stopped at the window, helpless against the fetid air. A quadroon, bearing a mug-laden tray, came in through another door. She wore a scarf of vivid colors wrapped tightly over one shoulder, and one brown breast was bare. Artillery seized a mug as she passed and dropped a coin

on the tray. The drink was bombo, made from dark Jamaica rum, and it went down sweetly, falsely allaying some of the burning brandy.

Ysabelle twisted her slender waist, and saw him. *"Hola, amigos!* What have we here? The Virgin must have answered my prayers. A gentleman's lost his way and strayed into the *paseo.* Not only that, but he's young!"

She left her dancing, and walked slowly toward Artillery, her hands on her hips. The guitarist stopped playing.

The room grew quiet. Artillery was watching Doctor Zeke. The old man turned, saw him, and seemed about to rise, then, without speaking, settled back to his cards again.

"Would you dance with me, senor?"

"You have a partner." Artillery swirled the rum in his mug, and took another swallow.

Ysabelle laughed. "I'm lame from his stumbling efforts and his booted feet, which have three times mashed my toe."

Laughter rolled through the room.

"Dance with her, man!" cried Ledoux. "We're tired of watching that stamping baboon, who raises dust in our nostrils. I've a nail in my bottom from a burst of langrage, or this wench and I would join you."

Ysabelle was tossed aside, and for the second time in the space of an hour, Artillery found himself facing the towering form of Geronimo.

"Ho! It's that stripling of a coxcomb again—the one so ready with the knife!" he roared. "The one who'd burn a candle for me. This time there'll be no drooling witch to curse me with spittle."

Doctor Zeke had turned in his chair again, and the man in the flowered vest was watching, his wolfish teeth clamped white on a twisted cigar.

Artillery did not see them. He had caught a flash of pulled-up dress, a slender leg encased in black, and a scarlet garter. He had seen the glint of the Betty lamps against the steel of Ysabelle's thin stiletto, snatched from its sheath on the garter.

"Don't toss me aside like a dingdilly, you spoiler of your mother's milk!" the Spanish girl screamed.

Artillery just found time to catch her wrist as she lunged for Geronimo's naked back. A twist of his fingers sent the slender dagger clattering.

"I am sad, senorita, but I came for cards," said Artillery. The strength of his grasp was quieting the struggling girl. He released

her, swept off his hat, and gave her and Geronimo a mocking, ceremonious bow. "It's not a witch who defeats you this time, senor, but a wench. Such love from women must be overpowering. Still, the fortitude with which you bear the points of knives sticking into you attests admirably to the thickness of your skin."

Artillery walked to the table, leaving Ysabelle chattering at the surly Geronimo.

The man in the flowered vest looked up. "I'm Quentin, senor. I heard your remark that you came for cards. We're playing *poque*." He pronounced the French word with two syllables, as though it were po-ker. "You acquit yourself well when knives flash about you. Perhaps you make a dangerous opponent at the table."

Doctor Zeke said, "Senor Armes is more than a son to me."

"His money is his passport here," one of the soldiers broke in. "I'm Manuel Romero."

"*Si*," said the other. "I'm Jose de la Maza. Money admits one to any game, and mine is nearly gone. A new supply would be welcome. The senor to my left, Rudolf Stetler, with my month's pay stacked before him, teaches us a French game from New Orleans in a German manner."

Artillery looked at the pile in front of the German and decided the stakes must be high.

Stetler nodded shortly, and said in guttural Spanish, "Show us your passport then, senor, and sit down."

At Stetler's left, George Jacobo laughed pleasantly, his teeth flashing against the blackness of his skin. "We Spanish need reinforcements, Senor Armes. Senor Quentin is American, so I sit between a double attack on the resources of Spain."

Artillery reached inside his shirt and took five doubloons from a pocket of his money belt before he sat down. As his blue coat fell back into place, there was a moment of silence at the table. Then Quentin said, "You go strangely armed for a white man, senor. A tomahawk is a clumsy weapon unless used by an Indian."

"Mine was a gift from Cheti Haiola of the Seminoles." Artillery sat down and stacked his doubloons before him. "I wear it as a gift as well as a weapon, because I value it more than knife or gun."

"And," said Doctor Zeke, "because he can use it, too. Unlike many Indians whom I've seen, his throw is deadly true."

Quentin laughed. "A pardonable boast, Senor Buckhart. I like your pride in one you love more than a son."

"Whose skill I'm ready to back with gold," said Doctor Zeke, "should the test of a wager interest you."

Quentin's deep eyes narrowed, and he chewed his cigar. "It's ten good paces from where we sit, Doctor Buckhart, to where our troubadour plucks his guitar. On the pineboard of the wall just above his head, you'll see where the crosscut saw has left a scar. I have five pesos, and the other players here might wish to join me. We will all pay you, otherwise you pay us all, if Senor Armes can throw his tomahawk and make it stick a hand's breadth from that scar." He turned to Artillery. "Can you do that, senor, or is the distance too far?"

Artillery smiled and shook his head. "The ceiling's too low, Senor Quentin. I would not have Doctor Zeke lose money."

The room had grown silent. The singer had unslung his guitar.

Standing with one hand on his hip, scowling at the table, Geronimo said, "It isn't a tomahawk. It's a blowhard that travels far."

Artillery felt the blood climb up to his hair.

Geronimo gave his raucous laugh. "Look you! He blushes like a schoolgirl caught in the outhouse."

Artillery turned and pointed to where a conch shell, used to prop the door, lay in a nearby corner. "If 'twas that, senors—"

Every eye in the room turned toward it, and as they turned, he pulled the tomahawk and threw. The shell smashed into a thousand pieces. The blade bit into the soft pinewood. The golden inlaid handle quivered and stopped, and stayed quite still, sticking out at an angle from the floor.

Quentin pulled his five pesos back, and turned his deep eyes toward Geronimo. "When the greatness of a hollow voice is stilled," he said, "a silence falls as soft as dropping snow."

★ 2 ★

ONE OF THE LAMPS had flickered and died, leaving a lingering oily smell. Another showed signs of burning low. The chastened Spanish soldiers, devoid of money, had left the game an hour before to seek their quarters. Captain Ledoux had slipped out quietly, his arm around the blonde Margot. The guitarist snored drunkenly in the corner. The quadroon with the naked breast went in and out tirelessly and without an order, constantly replenishing the empty mugs.

The room had become a set piece, a place where breathing was difficult—an inferno where Artillery's stomach crawled, and where

nothing was left in a sodden existence, except the cruel, leering face of Geronimo, staring greedily at the gold Artillery had won; and the knowledge that Ysabelle, sitting beside him, was wantonly pressing her breasts against his arm.

There seemed to be a limit to the effects produced by rum. His muscles moved, and his brain thought whitely, speeding events with startling swiftness while the universe stood still. So, in reality nothing moved at all, except his body, which stayed in one place, and at the same time propelled itself around through the heavens, caressing the naked bodies of women like some lustful shooting star. Only Doctor Zeke, unmoving and unchanged, remained as a rock to cling to, a pillar which might save him from plumbing the depths of damnation.

Stetler sucked steadily on a gurgling pipe with a china bowl. Quentin smoked one twisted cigar, then lit another, staring with his devil's eyes. George Jacobo looked blacker than ever above the white of his silken stock. The Negro's pile of money neither diminished nor grew, nor did his soft voice change, nor his laughter become louder or softer in the course of his careful play.

Something must break. Everything had an ending. Either you killed dogs like Geronimo, or you left them. Killing seemed the easier and the nicer since the slaver had thrust himself and his dangling earrings into the game two hours before. Either you killed a slut like Ysabelle or you bedded her; bedding her seemed the nicer. Once, Doctor Zeke had been some help; now he was help no more.

The hour was late. The *Blue Dolphin* would sail on the tide at the crack of dawn.

Artillery's fingers were gathering the cards, arranging them quickly, and shuffling. They were testing, too, for Geronimo had dealt them last. There should be thirty-two in the piquet deck used for play. Artillery had handled them so much since a child, he could tell by the weight and the feel, when shuffling, if one or more were gone. Geronimo had won at first, but now he was losing. While the soldiers were playing, Artillery had grown suspicious that the slaver might be aiding his luck with a high card held on his knee.

He passed the cards to the left for a cut. Geronimo split them, slapping them down, then spat on the floor. Artillery took them and dealt to the right, three all around, then watched the players' faces, and didn't touch his own three cards until after Geronimo picked up his hand and softly swore. The slaver was holding something big, probably a tricon. He was a stupid man, and when holding

threes before, had used the trick of disparaging his hand by swearing.

Quentin bet lightly, but Doctor Zeke, Jacobo, and Stetler pushed their cards to the center of the table, refusing to stay in the play.

"I'll double yours, Senor Quentin." Geronimo leered. "And double it once more."

Artillery looked at the cards he held, and Ysabelle pressed closer. He was conscious of her breathing; trembling at the smell of her heady perfume. He had nothing—a seven, a ten, and a jack, of different suits. There was chance for neither sequence nor flush. With only one more card—which was used by all the players—to be turned on the table, the best he could hope for was a pair.

He drained his mug of rum, and a wildness seized him. A heavy loss would release him, give him an excuse to leave with Doctor Zeke. Geronimo would be satisfied once he was ahead again. To Artillery, the gold meant nothing. He wanted to be free of Ysabelle, free of the heartache, which had struck so strong, over leaving the province. He wanted to be out of the smoky room, back on the deck of the ship, sailing away forever, breathing clean air.

He pushed in gold. "I'm doubling yours, Senor Geronimo—and then again."

Ysabelle stirred uneasily against his chair.

Quentin said, "The play's too strong," and threw in his cards.

"*Himmel!*" said Stetler, drumming his stubby fingers. "I'm happy, *hombres*, that I wasn't caught in there."

"I'll meet your bragging." Geronimo pushed in half the money before him, and said, "Turn."

Artillery took the card on the top of the deck and turned it over. It was a ten, and gave him a single pair.

"Thirty pesos," said Geronimo.

Artillery looked at the slaver's remaining money. "And raised," he said, "for all you have there." He would make it as quick as possible. His stomach was churning inside of him.

Geronimo stood up slowly, and just as slowly tore his hand in two, and tossed the pieces, face up, on the table. "Tricon of eights are worth a wager with honest players, but not with those who can deal themselves tens and turn up a fourth for a brelan-carré. There's a law for cozening gamblers on the seas." He leaned across the table. "I've a mind to enforce it, coxcomb, and cut off your hand."

"Clod of an oaf!" Ysabelle screamed at the scowling slaver. She snatched the cards from Artillery before he could stop her, and spread them face up. "Are your bowels all water that you fear to

back a tricon of eights against a pair of tens? You should cut off your own hands before you lose your smallclothes while learning to play"

Artillery pushed the girl back roughly, got to his feet, and gathered up his money, dumping it into his pockets. He flipped Ysabelle a doubloon. "Do we go, Doctor Zeke? It's late, and I care not for killing when we're sailing at break of day."

Doctor Zeke also rose.

"Hold!" said Quentin, more wolfish than ever. "In Georgia, charges of cheating are not passed so lightly, Senor Armes. There are those who might call it an admission—were you to have no more to say."

"I do not kill drunkards, senor, but if you must be satisfied—" Artillery leaned across the table and cuffed Geronimo twice on both cheeks with a force that rocked the slaver's head on his massive shoulders. "I've taken his money and swallowed his words. Perhaps that spanking will serve as pay."

Before the white of the finger marks had died, Geronimo's dirk was in his hand, held by the point, ready to throw. He stopped with his arm half-raised, and the oath on his lips half-uttered.

"Softly, softly," said Doctor Zeke. "The devil swims in a pool of blood when men are mad with rum." The old man's matched pistols were on his hips, come from nowhere, the hammers pulled back full. His words were infinitely gentle, but his blue eyes under his shaggy white brows promised death without quarter for anyone who stirred in the murky room. "You seem to have a zest for prompting slaughter, Senor Quentin. Perhaps it's the custom of your country, which is new and raw. I, who am even older than your country, dislike it. Like adultery, it easily lends itself to becoming a pleasant habit, and also, like adultery, it may have its place under certain provocations, but the wise man knows when he's had his fill."

"You take a lot upon yourself, senor," said Quentin. His hands were flat before him on the table.

"I know a lot," said Doctor Zeke. "This lad, Artillery, whom I love, was reared in my care. He's young and untried, but not unskilled. This ignorant ape, Geronimo, whose muscles are large from wielding a whip, would be dead ere now and starting to rot in the evening's heat had I not, in turn, whipped some precepts into this youth when he was but still a baby. Among those precepts was a word of God which says, 'Thou shalt not kill.'"

Quentin gave an ugly laugh. "Damn it, sir! You should dress the lad in petticoats and once you're gone, flowing skirts will hide his shame when he wets himself in fear."

"I'll thank you to hold your tongue, sir," said Doctor Zeke. "You're annoying me, and when I shake with annoyance, my finger trembles. I'd hate to cut off in his flowering prime a man who's due to live for many a year. I want all weapons placed on the table—yours, too, Artillery. When all of them are there, then I'll add mine. This Geronimo has asked for a drubbing. That he's a gouger shows in his ugly mien. I'm going to let the lad, barehanded, unarmed, and stripped to the waist, reduce him to a sniveling wreck. But the fight must be fair, and without the aid of gun or steel."

George Jacobo looked from the slaver to Artillery, then carefully laid his pistol down, butt first. "You show great faith in your stripling, Senor Buckhart. I trust that your faith is all in him, and not too much in God. This is a sight I would not miss. You ask for weapons. Let me be the first to offer mine."

Quentin followed, and then the rest.

The doctor turned toward Ysabelle. "If you'll show us again that shapely limb, senorita, and remove your stiletto from its place of hiding, the sight might even bring a glint of pleasure to eyes as old as mine."

The Spanish girl smiled and made haste to obey.

"And now we'll take places along the wall, away from the table." Doctor Zeke's unwavering pistols made a motion. "I trust, Artillery, you'll hurry this."

"'Twill be quicker than you think," said Geronimo.

"I'm sure," the doctor agreed, unruffled. "And worse for you. My sole concern is boarding our vessel. We haven't much time."

Artillery waited but a second before divesting himself of his knife and gun, and the tomahawk, which he had retrieved from the floor. He placed them beside Ysabelle's stiletto, stripped himself of coat and shirt, and hung them on the back of his chair. The others, except Geronimo and Doctor Zeke, had taken posts along the wall.

Artillery unstrapped his money belt and draped it across the old man's shoulder. "My gold," he whispered. "Take care." He pulled the sash of his breeches tighter, and knotted it firmly, then took a kerchief and tied it tight about his hair to leave no handhold for Geronimo's clutching fingers.

Geronimo stood waiting, crouched, his cruel eyes narrowed and fixed on Artillery's torso in a puzzled stare.

This was no lad to be broken in twain, no child to be bent like a growing twig. The ruffled shirt and fine blue coat had hidden muscles, flat and hard as fine cured leather and brought to strength by years of toil in the fields of corn and tobacco. The chest was that of a wrestler, not a boy, deep and full with the sturdiness of hand-hewn oak, shaped by endless journeys with paddle and push-pole. The flatness of the sun-tanned belly beneath the chest made the waist deceptively thin. The thighs were rock that could cling to the wildest horse unsaddled, with the help of the muscular whip-cord calves, molded like a dancer's, symmetrical and firm.

"*Himmel!*" breathed Stetler. "What say you now, Senor Geronimo? You're twice his weight and treble his girth, but before you're through those arms may squeeze you free of a cask of rum."

Quentin gave a silky whistle. "I withdraw my remark about petticoats. Speak up, Geronimo. Do you think 'twill be quick? We seem to have stripped a man. From the way you're staring, perhaps you thought to bare the rounded breasts of some pliant girl. Do his blushes amuse you now?"

The doctor put his pistols down and walked to the wall.

Geronimo charged, and again Artillery felt outside of himself, as though this were some fracas he was watching, some danger to another which did not concern him. Fear was a word he had often heard mentioned, but since the night in the swamp and the night of the raid on Drummond, he had known it only from tightness which sometimes seized his stomach.

He regarded Geronimo's onslaught with much the same emotion that years before had beset him as he watched the charge of the bristly boar. The slaver was more beast than man, an animal fattened and gross with the blood of others. You ran, or you stood before such an onslaught. If you chose to stand, you must also choose to destroy. That was the lesson he had learned as a boy. Sometimes, as now, it was quicker and more satisfying to destroy.

He stepped outside the flailing arms, stuck out his foot, and tripped the runner. Geronimo cursed, and smashed headlong into the wall. The flimsy house shook.

A shrill scream sounded, and Celine, white as parchment, appeared in the door.

The maddened slaver twisted around and charged again, clutching this time for a death hold on his foe. Artillery smashed a fist to the fat of the big man's stomach, waited until the gross head dropped, and then broke the slaver's nose with another blow, but Geronimo's hands had found him and pulled him down. They were

at his throat. Teeth had met in his shoulder. A thumb crept up and sought his eye.

He went limp and inert, as the Indians had taught him. When he felt the body on him relax, secure in its sense of false triumph, his knee smashed up with all its strength full into Geronimo's groin. The hands and the teeth that were worrying him let go. He flung himself back, placed both feet in the big man's stomach, and straightened. The slaver's body sailed through the air and crashed full weight.

Artillery was up without using his hands, and on him before the slaver's head had struck the floor. He landed with one fist clenched tight. It jammed into Geronimo's face, packed full with the weight of Artillery's fall. His knee went into the slaver's stomach. Geronimo groaned, and moved no more.

Celine came in with water and bathed the bite on Artillery's shoulder. The watchers stood by the wall, unmoving, held tight by the moments of violent swiftness. Artillery found that his knees were weak as when he had won in wrestling with Hasse Micco. Somehow he knew they would always be weak when he won at fighting. It had happened again—that momentary threatening of muscles to betray him. It would always happen, as it had always happened before.

He walked to the table, leaned across the array of weapons, and took his shirt from the chair to put it on. His arms were already in the sleeves when he heard Celine give a frightened scream. He turned in time to see that Geronimo was up from the floor, but before Artillery could move or speak or try to free his pinioned arms, the slaver had reached behind his neck and plucked a dirk from a sheath concealed in the folds of his greasy hair and hidden under the handkerchief he wore.

"The finish, dog!" Geronimo said, and started forward.

He was very quick, but Doctor Zeke, for all his age, was quicker. A pistol poked through the long white beard and fired. The heavy ball at ten-foot range shattered the slaver's forearm, spinning him half around.

Quentin stepped forward and picked up the dirk, paying no attention to Geronimo, who had fallen and lay writhing and groaning. "We thought you unarmed, Senor Doctor." His face was ugly.

"Aye," said Buckhart. He was beating himself frenziedly on the stomach. "And you thought the same of Geronimo. Yet that's his dirk you're slipping into your pocket. I'm never unarmed, Senor

Quentin, when I have cause to fear trickery in others." He rushed forward suddenly and hung his beard in a pannikin of water that Celine had brought for Artillery.

Quentin's scowl turned into a grin. "You seem to be on fire, senor."

"Aye," said Buckhart. "Men have laughed at my beard, and lived to die through its thickness. It serves to hide the pistol I wear in my waistcoat as you do. It equally serves as an ambush for me to shoot through. But this subterfuge has a drawback—the flash of the powder always burns it. Still we put up with those petty things, so long as those we love are safe."

"You strike me as a man who trusts no one, Senor Doctor."

"Only the Lord and my shooting, and this lad, Artillery." The doctor squeezed water from his soaking whiskers and added, "Perhaps that's why I've lived enough years to have a beard this long."

6

IT WAS DARK in the streets, and the town, with dawn a few short hours away, had merged into a single black patch in form. Four bells rang from a ship in the harbor, to be taken up by others and passed on. Somewhere near the city gates, a dog barked intermittently, and stopped at the sound of a sentry's challenge as an officer passed on inspection.

Doctor Buckhart and Quentin led the way down sandy streets discernible only by streaks of gray beneath the trees. Artillery followed with George Jacobo and Celine. Geronimo, mouthing oaths of vengeance, had been taken off by Stetler to waken Doctor Karl Sontage, the town's only surgeon, who might patch Geronimo's broken nose and shattered arm.

Watching Geronimo's departure, Quentin had said abruptly to Doctor Zeke, "I have news of a Spanish prisoner which you and Senor Armes may find of interest."

"Your conduct tonight, Senor Quentin, has given me little but cause to mistrust you." Doctor Zeke was busy buckling his pistols on. "If you have news, give it quickly."

"Not here," said Quentin. "I'm a guest at the home of Senor Jacobo. It's on the way to the wharves. If you join us in a nightcap of rum before sailing, we'll see that you're safely aboard your ship before dawn."

"I intend to be aboard her safely," said Doctor Zeke. "If you plan more trickery, say so, and let me and the lad be gone."

Celine had overheard, and put in quickly, "Trust him, Doctor Zeke, and do what he says, I beg of you."

At the pain in her voice, Doctor Zeke's cold eyes had grown warm in one of those tender manifestations which Artillery had never been able to fathom.

"Of course, my dear. You'd want to know even more than I." Doctor Buckhart turned to Quentin. "We agree, but the senorita must be allowed to come along."

"Good," said Quentin quickly. "Jacobo?"

"An honor." Jacobo bowed.

As Artillery followed along through the sandy streets, he wondered if he would ever entirely understand his crusty old mentor's personal standards of right and wrong. For six long years, Doctor Zeke had hated Angela, terming her trollop and vixen. Yet to Celine, openly a part of the Paseo de las Damas, Doctor Zeke gave the deference due to a lady of rank and breeding.

Jacobo's house on the Calle Amalia was marked by a single candle, burning in the window. The house, set back in a yard of pomegranate and Spanish fig trees, was larger than many of the others Artillery had seen, and better built. Its walls of hand-hewn cedar were erected on a lasting tabby foundation, made from burned oyster shells added to whole shells with an equal proportion of water. Wild coral, white honeysuckle, thistle, and purple verbenas made the path a lane of color.

Candles were lighted, and rum was poured in the living room. Artillery, still feeling shaky, settled himself on a sofa beside Celine and drank his portion gratefully, thinking idly that life might swirl violently about one in the province, but nothing disturbed the Spanish custom of serving some heady libation before talk began.

"This is an honor," said Doctor Buckhart. He toasted Jacobo and kept his eyes on Quentin. "But I came for news of Dan McKetch." He drank liberally of the rum.

Quentin answered the toast, and then took time to settle himself, cross his legs, and light a new cigar. "You're impetuous, sir."

"Nay, call it suspicious," said Doctor Zeke. "We're on a journey. The night's grown late, and we're traveling far."

"To Charleston," said Quentin.

The doctor's white eyebrows arched themselves. "You've called me impetuous, and I've said I was suspicious. Now I might call you

presumptuous, sir. Perhaps, since you know our destination, you'd have the courtesy to inform us who you are."

"You might introduce me, George," said Quentin.

"He's Anthony Quentin, Deputy United States Marshal for Georgia." Jacobo smiled. "A very old friend."

"I remain unimpressed," said Doctor Zeke. "Not by your title, but by where you are. A United States marshal on this side of the St. Marys River has truly traveled far."

"You'll think me still more presumptuous," said Quentin, "when I tell you that I know all about you, and McKetch, and Artillery Armes, and Mrs. McKetch on board the ship. I have friends among the Indians—Cheti Haiola of the Seminoles, for one." His wide teeth showed. "Lest you think me an enemy, I hasten to say that the things that I've heard have been such praise that your coming to Fernandina was lucky. You've probably saved me a journey to Charleston to find you there."

"Your compliments are flattering," said Doctor Zeke. "If you'll give me quick news of Dan, as promised, I'll forget your uncouthness of the hours just past, and lay it to the fact, as I said before, that your country is new and raw."

"You miss very little." Quentin de-ashed his cigar, and a muscle rippled along his jaw. "What I did tonight was deliberate, Doctor Buckhart. I've heard stories of the prowess of this young man—that he rides a colt who, when aged enough, will be faster than Black Storm; that his tomahawk and his hunting-knife are deadly in a throw; that his shooting is as good as your own; that his fighting—" He expressively waved his cigar. "What I heard aroused my interest, but Indian tales are tall. I hadn't much time, Doctor Buckhart."

"You had time enough to annoy us, sir."

"I intended to annoy you," said Quentin. "The United States is badly in need of such a man as Cheti Haiola delights to describe —a man who holds his head, and tongue, and liquor, and can play at cards with unchanging face; who fights only when provoked to fight, and who then can kill, but doesn't; a man who can hold his head when aroused by seductive women. If such a man was Artillery Armes, I had to find out, because my country had given me orders if there were such a man not to let him leave this province." He brushed an ash from his short goatee. "I believed what I saw."

Artillery said, "I sail at dawn—with Doctor Buckhart and Amy."

"When I've finished speaking, you will not sail," said Quentin.

"Then finish speaking, Marshal Quentin." Artillery stroked the plume of the hat on his knee.

"You will not sail because you're a man of head and heart, and because if you try, I'll stop you."

"We have clearance from Commandant Lopez," said Doctor Buckhart.

"But not with the United States of America," Quentin told him. "If you sail from any port in Florida without my permission the instant you set foot in Charleston, you'll run afoul of the American law."

Doctor Zeke snorted. "I'll thank you to be consistent, sir. In a single breath you say you know my history, and then proceed to threaten me with the law. We have money to buy land and slaves and cattle. Is it the custom of your country to close its doors to decent and prosperous settlers?"

"The ways of my country are sometimes strange," said Quentin. "A stringent act putting all foreign residents under surveillance was passed by Congress only six years ago. Should you sail for Charleston in the morning, before you could get your citizenship you might have to live in the United States as long as fourteen years.

"The President has, during that time, the power to expel you from the country should he judge you dangerous to our peace and safety. You might be subject to imprisonment even, should you speak against the President or Congress with intent to defame or bring them into contempt or disrepute. I mention this, Doctor Buckhart, to show that in the United States you are not dealing with Spanish law, which you have flaunted for years."

Artillery stood up suddenly. "I have flaunted no laws, Marshal Quentin—either those of your country or of Spain. I've been taught that a quality distinguishing Americans was directness. I'm neither American nor Spanish. Like Dan McKetch, I feel that I have no country. Now, through your threats, you indicate that I'm to have no country in the future, for unless I do your bidding, I'm to be barred from settling in America. Is it a fault of mine that I'm also barred from remaining here as a citizen of Spain?"

"I've made no threats," said Quentin. "You misunderstand me."

"Perhaps I do," Artillery told him, "for you speak with all the flowery indirectness of a Spanish official. Since our time is so short, will you answer questions?"

"Proceed," said Quentin.

"Where is Dan McKetch?"

"He's imprisoned in Morro Castle. He was taken there from St. Augustine a week ago."

"*Dieu!*" said Celine. "He will die there. All do."

"Unless he can be released," said Quentin.

"And that might be arranged?" Artillery demanded. "For one who serves your country?"

"I can promise nothing," said Quentin.

"I could, Senor Armes," Jacobo put in. "I could promise that certain aids would get through to your friend from Fernandina, and that certain concessions might be made for his comfort."

"What do you want me to do?" Artillery asked shortly.

Quentin moved to a candle, relit his cigar, and sat down again. "I want you to settle in Florida. For a time you can search for grazing lands. This search will take you often between St. Marys River and a plantation called Fort George, some miles east of the Cowford."

"Fort George is the home of John Houston McIntosh," said Doctor Zeke.

"Precisely," said Quentin. "A Spanish planter. Senor McIntosh is having difficulty getting his mail."

"You jest, sir," said Doctor Zeke.

"Far from it, Doctor Buckhart, for the service is bad in the United States, where roads are rutted so deep that the passengers in a lumbering stage must move from side to side like ballast in a sailboat to keep themselves from upsetting. A letter from Washington to St. Marys costs twenty-five cents and takes twenty-five days to make the journey. Yet the letter gets through to St. Marys. The trouble comes when we try to deliver that letter from St. Marys to Fort George."

"That's scarce forty miles," Artillery figured quickly. "Hell's lead, sir! I could ride it in a day."

Quentin suppressed a grin. "Precisely. The question is, could you ride it in a night—and through a cordon of Governor Enrique White's hand-picked dragoons who, together with a score or more of their Indian friends, have orders to stop such letters from going through."

"You know well he could," said Doctor Zeke, "or you'd not be taking his time and mine. But the lad can't stay on Spanish soil. It's not my will to have him end in Morro Castle like Dan.."

"Nor my will, either," said Quentin. "I have citizenship papers in my pocket for both him and you and Amy McKetch. Yours and the lady's will permit you to land in Charleston as citizens of the

United States. His will make him Senor Artillery Armes, a citizen of Spain, with possible land grants due. Your further courtesy and safety in the United States will be guaranteed so long as the lad here does his work well. What say you?"

"I say we sail." Doctor Zeke clenched one fist tight, then slowly unclenched it, and stared at his fingers. "The lad's well-known in Florida—known to Governor White's first aide, Don Jose de Reduro. He'll be in chains in a fortnight, or on the very first time he has to set foot in St. Augustine."

Quentin grinned and laid aside his cold cigar. "Am I stupid, Doctor Buckhart, or is it you? Would a man on such a mission be worth his salt if any Spaniard in the province could seize him without provocation? We're not playing at skittles, sir. We're pressed right now by England. We've been cheated on the Louisiana Purchase, which should give to the United States the whole of West Florida. There's trouble in the wind, sir, and we can't long stand this province backing up against the St. Marys River while it's owned by a weakling nation which puts ten men in fancy suits to protect a port the size of Fernandina.

"There are others here who realize this, too—George Jacobo, whose mind is set on some day stopping the selling of his people like cattle; Mademoiselle Lemain here, who hears a lot of valuable interest, and who hates this upstart rat, Napoleon. These messages, or letters, or what you like to call them, to Senor McIntosh must get through."

"I might ask who these letters are from, since they mean so much to you." Doctor Zeke ran a hand through his thick white hair.

"You might," said Quentin, "and I'd tell you true they're from a man who wants this province for the United States without a war. They're from a man who wanted the abolition of slavery when the Constitution of our country was written. You might equally guess that man might be Thomas Jefferson, the President of the United States, and that what I'm telling you might equally not be true."

Years had passed in Artillery's mind while Quentin was speaking. Doctor Zeke was old and Amy was tired. They had taken him in as a son at his birth and done what they could without faltering to rear him with ideals that were strong. This was his chance to repay a little, to make them secure in America as they had made him secure in Florida. Both had suffered heartaches enough for any one lifetime. Both were good, and certainly future peacefulness was their due.

"I'll stay, sir," said Artillery, "under condition that Docter Zeke and Amy become free to live as they wish when they reach your country, and that I can be safe here so long as I work for you. How will I know that this is true?"

Quentin reached in his pocket, and took out a parchment, engraved, embossed, and stamped with a seal over trailing ribbons. "Our government has ways and means of getting what it wants, Mr. Armes. You can judge of your importance to us and of your safety if you read this with care, and note the signature. It's that of His Most Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain."

The wind had died, and the fog crept in through the inlet, rolled silently down the Amelia River, and forced its way across the marshes up to the edge of the town. Standing on the wharf with Doctor Zeke and Marshal Quentin, Artillery felt as though the mist had shrouded him, too. It was in his nostrils, in his lungs, and deeper, penetrating into his soul.

Quentin, carrying a lantern from Jacobo's house, kicked some sleeping blacks awake, and gave orders to have a lighter manned to bring a horse ashore. Under the whip of his words, the sleepy blacks scurried to obey.

Speechless, Artillery climbed into a rowboat with Doctor Zeke and Quentin. The marshal took the oars and began to row. They were going nowhere, moving through a Gehenna that had no shape. The water was the River Styx, calm and hopeless. A clatter came from the wharf edge as the lighter pushed out from shore, but nothing could be seen. The lantern held by Doctor Zeke was a puffball of yellow, lighting the old man just enough to turn him into a Charon of the ferry.

A hail came from above, and Quentin answered. The rowboat bumped, and Artillery followed the bobbing lantern upward into a void that was as formless as the future. There would be nothing left of the past but Celine and Black Cloud once he quit the ship for shore. He would never see Doctor Zeke again, nor Amy. It was nice to have a country to work and fight for, and in time he might even come to love it, as General Bowles loved England. Right now, he felt he needed more. A country was a formless thing, too big to caress, too austere to give you love and friendship and counsel, too impersonal to bake you cookies or stand with leveled pistols at its hips to see that you got fair play.

He left Doctor Zeke and the marshal talking with Captain Shanks, made his way through the bustle on deck, and went below

to Amy's cabin. A crack of light showed beneath her door. He rapped, and found her still up and dressed, seated on the stateroom bench, a Bible open on her knee.

She looked at his face, and said, "You've heard of Dan."

"He's been taken to Havana."

"Morro Castle?"

He nodded. "I may be able to help him, Amy. I may be able even to get him released."

She shook her head. "You can't. I know."

"But I may. Look." He took the parchment from his pocket, handed it to her, and blurted out the story of Quentin and Celine. She opened the parchment over the Bible, read it, then gave it back.

"It means safety for you and Doctor Zeke," Artillery insisted. "Quentin has one for each of you. You'll be protected in the United States, and never be in danger again."

"That makes no difference, Artillery. The thing is that you want to stay."

"I don't," he protested. "I want to go with you and Doctor Zeke."

She shook her head and smiled. "You can't hide your heart, lad, from a woman who's watched you since you were a baby. Quentin couldn't keep you here, nor anyone, if you wanted to go. This is your land—its swamps, its trees, the smell of its fruits, the moon on its lakes in summer, its prairies, its birds, the deer and the cattle that graze on the great savannas; the Indians who love you. Look, Artillery."

She got up, took his hand, and led him to the porthole. "There's nothing you can see now, except mist on the river. That will vanish with the sun at dawn, and all the things I have spoken of will come to light again, endless and unchanged. They've seen the flags of France and England and Spain. They'll see still others, and still will be here—Florida—long after you and Dan and Ezekiel and I are gone."

She unlocked her sea chest and give him his gold in the saddlebags. "You'll need this, and I have plenty. Go now, quickly, and God bless you. *Hasta la vista!*" She kissed him lightly, pushed him quickly from the cabin, and closed the door.

The passage was dark and blurry where the fog had swirled in. He got his rapier and saddle from his stateroom, and went on deck. Doctor Zeke was standing at the rail with Quentin, staring out toward the invisible town.

"Black Cloud's waiting for you," the marshal said. "I saw her loaded and on her way ashore."

Doctor Zeke straightened up, put his hands on Artillery's shoulders, and stared at him long. "Partings should be brief, lad. God's seen fit to spare me to see you grown. I've learned much in my day and tried, because I love you, to pass it on. 'Twill be of use only if it keeps you from doing wrong."

He put his arms around Artillery and held him close for an instant. He pressed his lips to each cheek, then pushed him away. "You've broken the reserve of an Englishman, lad. That's a dangerous thing. *Adios.* Be gone." He turned from the rail and went below.

Ashore, Marshal Quentin watched Artillery saddle. "There's a place for you at Jacobo's. You can sleep there in comfort, and we can talk in the morning."

Artillery swung into the saddle. "With your permission, sir, right now I'd rather be alone."

"As you wish, sir." The marshal vanished into the fog, chewing an unlighted cigar.

For an hour, Artillery rode slowly through the black moss-hung streets, where even the Paseo de las Damas was darkened. He was alone in a world of spirits, the only living thing that moved in its single ghostlike town.

A voice cried, "*Quien vive?*" and he found himself stopped at the city gates. It was a chance to prove the good faith of Quentin. Artillery produced the parchment from his pocket. The sentry held a lantern close, and read with a frown, which was lost in an expression of awe. He set down his lantern, returned the parchment, and suddenly snapped his gun to present.

Artillery rode on south toward Don Fernando's plantation, southward past the fragrant groves, the way they had come the day before. A breeze stirred, and the fog began moving out to sea. He wheeled Black Cloud in sudden panic, and galloped back to Fernandina in a rush to beat the dawn.

The puzzled sentry snapped his salute, and passed him in again. He rode the length of the Calle San Fernando, and stopped on a rise at the end of the street to sit without motion looking out over the marshland toward the river. Fort San Carlos appeared to his left, as though a shroud had been slowly drawn away. The wharf lay before him, with blacks asleep on the stacked-up bales of cotton. Then the ships appeared and grew clearer, as the galleons had be-

come clear on the St. Johns River the night that he rode through the rain in search of Dan. In back of him, red showed over the treetops, and slowly the ships in the river began to swing as the tide grew full and threatened to turn.

A shout came ashore, and a winch clanked on the *Blue Dolphin.* Red banners burst from her mastheads as though the morning was heralding the coming of some Spanish grandee. Her sails set fuller, caught by the breeze and reddened still more by the rising sun. Slowly, she moved, and then faster, setting her course out to sea.

Amy stood at the starboard rail, her handkerchief aflutter.

"Hasta la vista," Artillery said beneath his breath, and waved the hat with the sweeping plume.

A horseman rode up beside him, and stood there, still as he. Artillery's heart and eyes were brimming, and he did not look or turn. Steady, he sat with the hat held high until the ship moved out to sea.

"She sent me ashore, lad," a voice rumbled out beside him. "She said you were young and your mission dangerous, and that my place was with you till the Lord saw fit to tell me it was time to die. Be glad it's not the iron marshal who is sitting here watching your tears stream down. It's not manly, lad, to cry."

Artillery twisted in his saddle, and the rising sun was painting Savanna a rosy hue, dyeing the old man's beard and hair as red as the vanishing sails.

"Doctor Zeke," he said, and the break in his voice was the break that was there when he called through the night for Dan. "Doctor Zeke—you've come to stay?"

"Aye," said Doctor Buckhart gruffly. "I ride as always when we have a call."

BOOK FOUR

1805

★

DAUNA

★

CHAPTER 1

THE candles in the heavy hand-wrought silver candelabra bent their flames from an outside breeze as John Houston McIntosh took Quentin's letter from Artillery and broke the seal. Artillery had expected an older man, but the thin-lipped Scot with the well-clubbed hair and eyes more frosty than Doctor Zeke's was in his early thirties. His greeting had been sincere but formal as he waited for them on the wide veranda, watched them swing from their saddles, and ushered them into the spacious living room.

"Your obedient servant, gentlemen. I had word of your coming." His rolling r's, pushing impolitely against each other, betrayed his descent with the slightest tinge of a Scottish burr. He glanced again at Quentin's communication, and with a strong hand protruding from his Mechlin cuff, waved Buckhart and Artillery to a narrow settee.

Watching McIntosh's spare but well-knit figure in the latest mode of cutaway coat and tapering tight breeches, Artillery became suddenly conscious of his own dust-grimed jacket of blue and the fact that two hard days on the fifty-mile ride from Fernandina had left Doctor Zeke tired and dishevelled, too.

Dan had possessed some beautiful things, but they were scattered haphazardly about the main house of the compound. Here at Fort George Plantation was an air of wealth, security, and breeding such as Artillery had never encountered. The long, cool room seemed part of the white-painted house, as the house seemed part of the ancient trees bordering the width of the St. Johns River. The Mexican matting on the floor, the desk of deep mahogany, the delicate straight-lined Sheraton side chairs, the curtains of chintz

which bellied at the windows, and the van de Velde marine hung on the wall were just as much inevitably a part of the room.

Through an arch at the left, Artillery could see the wide hall and a narrow staircase leading to the second floor. Through another door at the foot of the stairs, a candle in a hurricane shade burned on the stand of a polished fortepiano.

McIntosh read the letter a second time, scanning the words with care, as though to discover some inner meaning not quite apparent in the deputy marshal's simply-scrawled missive. He placed it face up on the desk, still holding to a corner with thumb and finger, then thoughtfully measured the length of Doctor Zeke's beard and turned his gaze on Artillery.

"I find myself remiss, gentlemen." He rose with quick decision and jerked a tasseled pull-cord, jangling a call bell somewhere in the rear of the house. "You'll be my guests tonight, and there'll be time for talking. Meanwhile, you've ridden far. I've had your horses stabled and your saddlebags taken to your rooms."

A liveried black houseman showed at the living room door, bearing a decanter and glasses on a mammoth silver tray. A golden liquor was liberally poured and passed around.

"Your health," said McIntosh, "and may our association ripen. Marshal Quentin described you here as fearless." He tapped the letter. "I have need of such." He gave a smile that was cold and fleeting. "Need of men whose heart is in an idea rather than the gold I am willing to pay."

"Your servant," said Artillery, and drank, surprised at the palatable warmth and smoothness.

"Bless my soul." Doctor Zeke dabbed at his mouth with a kerchief. "I've not tasted the equal of your whisky, sir, for half a century or more. The last that approached it was when I stopped at an inn en route to Edinburgh."

McIntosh, watching Artillery's surprised expression, indulged in another smile. "It's been said we Scots are soured, Mr. Armes. The truth is, it's our stomachs, not our dispositions, sir. The Scots whisky you're drinking was casked in the cellars of Lachlen McIntosh of Knocknagail, near to a century ago. It takes age to make a product which combines both strength and mellowness." He bowed in deference to Doctor Buckhart. "The walls of my stomach dissipate rapidly under the acid served by the Spaniards as wine and rum. Do you snuff?"

He extended his box. Artillery shook his head, but Doctor Zeke dipped with his host, and together they sneezed politely.

"I detain you with garrulous nonsense when you want a tub." McIntosh rang again, and the houseman came to lead the way upstairs.

Artillery's room was small, but furnished with the same air of comfort and grace that distinguished the downstairs. The branches of a fig tree brushed against the single window. A long tin tub had been pulled from its place of concealment beneath a high four-poster to occupy the center of the floor. The steaming water which half filled it was blue and clear. Drawn from a flowing artesian well outside of the house, it permeated the room with a slight, but not unpleasant, sulphurous odor.

His saddlebags had been unpacked. Fresh linen lay upon the bed, but his best blue jacket, made by Amy, had vanished, and his especial pride, a pair of long tight gaitered pantaloons, recently come to style, and procured from a tailor in Fernandina, were nowhere to be seen. His black evening slippers were missing, too.

He stripped off his high-top riding boots to free his hot and tired feet, and started a second search of saddlebags and room. It occurred to him then that his rumpled clothes had been taken below by servants for pressing. There was a bell-pull on the wall, but he hesitated to ring. He was not used to service, and the unfamiliar opulence was filling him with awe.

He stripped, and crawled into the velvety water, and lay there a while in welcome relaxation, his back turned toward the door. A smell of cooking seeped up from the kitchen. The warmth of the water against his body and the potent old whisky in his veins were soothing. It was nice to be rich, nicer to have an employer as powerful as John Houston McIntosh, who could have your rumpled clothes pressed and get your passports from the king.

He leaned his head against the top of the scooped-out back rest, and closed his eyes. He was half asleep when someone knocked. His mind employed with future plans and the fate of nations, Artillery, expecting the houseman with his clothes, called, "Come in."

The door latch clicked, and light footsteps sounded behind him.

"*Gracias.*" Artillery pointed to a chair near the window. "You can put them there."

A girl walked past the tub, moving with quiet dignity. She held his freshly polished slippers in one hand and his clothes across her arm. She wore a soft white dress that fell in straight, full lines to her ankles. A kerchief of the brightest green was tight across her full high breasts, and another of flaming yellow served as a cap for her

blue-black hair. The lambent candlelight intensified the softness of her ivory skin. She walked erect, striding with the effortless ease bred only on the carpets of the forests.

A bar of soap slipped from Artillery's hand and plopped into the water. He snatched for the towel which lay on a rug beside the tub. He had never seen such beauty. His mouth hung open, words of protest refusing to form. Like an awkward oaf, he could merely sit in embarrassed silence.

Taking her time, as though quite unaware of his presence, the girl disposed his clothes upon the chair. When her task was finished, she turned and faced him. Her dancing black eyes, shining with the clear, pure depth of the ripest of olives, roved over his body. Helpless to move, he squirmed beneath the survey.

Then she grinned, and in that instant neither of them was there. The room, the candles, the tub, and the girl dropped back to Cheti Haiola's village. There was only one creature living who could fill him with such irritation. He had known her but briefly, but her mocking grin had peeped from behind a thousand trees in a thousand dreams—Dauna, the Light One.

She had outrun him and then, not satisfied, had thrown him flat in wrestling to stamp his shame upon his lips with an adolescent kiss. Then for days she had mocked him. Now the gods had given her beauty to turn a head far stronger than his. It simply wasn't fair.

"Get out!" he said.

"*Por Dios.*" Her eyes grew limpid. "Has the senor then become such a man that he does not know me? To get such a body one must have suffered through many wrestling lessons." She took a step forward, peering closer. "Such thighs betoken a swiftness that might outrun me today, and that beauty of face is rare in a man, and such yellow in the hair."

"Get out, you shameless she-wolf!" He had never felt so naked, even in the creek under Angela's mocking stare.

"You bade me enter, senor."

"And now I bid you be gone. I'll—I'll—" He lost his words and began to plead. "Get out, Dauna, and don't stand there staring!"

"You could have me flogged," she said softly. "Or would you dare? I'm just a slave girl, Senor Armes. You've never even asked how I came here—or don't you care?"

"A charming scene," said Doctor Zeke's voice in back of Artillery. "The years have made me conventional, and the informality of entertaining a wench in a bathtub brightens my eyes. Perhaps because it's so rare."

Artillery was all too familiar with the particular tone which Doctor Zeke used to classify a man as a whoreson. His skin grew red as a fresh boiled crab. The situation was Dauna's fault, but nothing he might do or say could alter it. Doctor Zeke had a code of bluff and candid honor and within its embrace all true men protected women. Artillery would only worsen affairs in the old man's estimation through any attempt to lay blame on the girl.

Disconcerting muteness seized him again. Caught between Doctor Zeke's barbed sarcasm and Dauna's detestable amusement, he could only lie there helpless and impotently squirm.

"Bless me, sir!" Buckhart continued icily. "Has some libidinous devil possessed you that you lie there quietly lusting—reveling in your shame? Dismiss this Jezebel! You're still not calloused enough from the saddle to like the weight of my cane!"

"*Perdon, Vuestra Merced!*" Dauna's use of the title "Your Grace" was sweet as flowing treacle. She gave the irate old man an elaborate curtsy. "I meant no harm. I was overjoyed at seeing Senor Armes downstairs. I pressed his clothes. When he bade me enter, I came in, not dreaming he was—" Her black eyes were cast down demurely.

"Aye," said Buckhart, walking around the tub to fix his suspicious gaze on Artillery. "My nose grows old that I cannot smell a rotting cheese beneath my nostrils. You've had dalliance with this wench before. Speak then. Where?"

"I've seen her but once, sir," Artillery protested. "That was years ago, in Cheti Haiola's village—the first time I was there. She's a sister to Hasse Micco—as I am brother."

"Enough of such incestuous prattling. 'Twould be better to pray for your immortal soul!" Doctor Zeke swung on Dauna. "Be gone, you simpering baggage, lest I have your master bare your bottom to the paddle. I'm of a mind to start myself with a cuff on your ear."

"*Si, Vuestra Merced!*" Dauna curtsied again, and swept by the tub, then paused at the door. "If Senor Armes needs more of me, he has but to ring."

The damned girl was laughing at him. As she closed the door, Artillery looked at the bell cord and muttered, "The only thing I'd want her for would be to flay her alive of her ivory skin!"

Yet, as he dressed, her presence lingered disturbingly. Doctor Zeke had gone to the window to stare out at the branches of the fig tree, his hands clasped behind him in tight disapproval. His ascetic silence, as it always had, filled Artillery with a sense of sinking into a morass.

The soft clean smell of the woods and the river was drifting in through the window. In the room below, chords were struck on the fortepiano, and a woman's clear voice began to sing—"Anna" first, then the ballad "Old Colony Times":

"In good old Colony Times,
When we were under the King,
Three roguish chaps fell into mishaps,
Because they could not sing."

Could Doctor Zeke fathom what the music and the sweetness of the night were doing to him? The warmth of the Seminole village, the fierce wild heat of its primitive love—as clean as its raging fire and its copper-hued dancers—was torturing him again, and Dauna's childish kiss of mockery was fresh on his lips.

The water in the tub had been the water of the creek, painfully pleasant against his skin. Dauna had been Angela, naked and tempting, killing all thoughts of Doctor Zeke's righteous, stern, and celibate God with a spell of intoxicating legerdemain.

"I'm sorry, sir!" Artillery murmured. "I've really only seen her once before, and then but briefly." Contrite affection made him speak, a sudden alarm at his own secret thoughts which threatened to run amok in unbridled wildness. The old man's indomitable spirit still ruled, even though fear of his stinging cane was long since gone.

"I'll thank you not to be sorry, lad." As he turned from the window, Doctor Zeke's white eyebrows were drawn together, as though by anguish. "God's brought you to manhood with a body fine and strong and a brain that may take you far. Bed this wench should the fancy seize you. She's limpid at the sight of your smooth tanned skin, and has more life than many I've seen—though the Spanish trollop at Fernandina was not to be sneezed upon—but make your dalliance the passing fancy of a cockspur—and let it not lead to marriage."

"I had no thought of marriage, sir."

"There's never thought of marriage, lad, when a youth's afire, but seldom is a wench become pliable without some thought of having her lost virginity healed by canon law. The tableau when I walked in here was one I've seen before—and acted in, if truth were known, which is why I'm with you now. I liked not either this slave girl's smile nor the look in your eyes, which I've never seen before."

"She's very beautiful, sir." Artillery found himself unconsciously defending. "And light in color for a Maroon."

Doctor Zeke's voice lowered. "Have I mentioned the shade of

her skin? Here in the province, lad, you'll need a wife to help you win. Zephaniah Kingsley, our wealthiest planter, is married to an African princess, Anna Madegigine Jai. Bowles' wife was a princess of the Creeks—and both much darker than this Maroon."

"Then what's the difference, sir?"

"The difference is, lad, both those women were royalty, and both born free. You've far to go with McIntosh. The emblem from which you get your name tells us your father was a British officer. He'd tell you now, as I do, that a man who marries a vassal becomes a slave himself. Look not to a woman's color, lad, which can't be seen when she's bedded in darkness. Look to her status in society. I'll say no more, for there's the gong for our dinner."

Artillery's mind was tumbling in confusion when they reached the dining room and sat down to the repast of fresh fried trout from the river, with greens, potatoes, and the lightest of corn bread. He had met Mistress Eliza McIntosh, a gracious woman in her twenties, whose brocade gown and polished manner spoke of her wealthy New York family. She had risen from the fortepiano to greet him, her smile approving, but his bow had been awkward, for Doctor Zeke's lecture was still rankling.

Artillery ate the well-cooked food without enjoyment. His throat was dry, and not to be moistened even by a third glassful of his host's St. Lucar wine.

When their plates were pushed away, McIntosh came in and joined them, closing the door to the drawing room behind him. Seated, he poured himself a glass of port and lit a cigar.

"My compliments on your taste, sir," said Doctor Zeke. "You've a beautiful home, and a peaceful one. One of the finest I've seen, sir, and I've traveled far."

"But not a safe one," said McIntosh. He held his wine to the light, and then sipped it. "I've heard we have a common bond. There's no safety for decent people under Spain, *amigos,* no matter where they are. You have a friend, I believe, who lies today in chains in Morro Castle. Let me assure you, gentlemen, it was not his deeds that put him there, for men far worse are roaming the province unmolested. His main fault lay in being a man who refused to pay his tribute in gold to the cupidity of Spain."

He drained his glass, and set it down so hard that he snapped the stem. "I'll be brief, gentlemen, and not bore you with words and histories of the McIntosh clan. We're fighters, sir—but fair ones. My grandfather, John Mohr McIntosh, came to Georgia with General Oglethorpe in seventeen thirty-four. Caught in a fight on the bor-

der, he was the first of our line to suffer the indignity of a Spanish gaol. I have a cousin, another John McIntosh, a Revolutionary colonel, whom I believe you know." He paused to stare at Doctor Buckhart.

"Aye," said Doctor Zeke. "I've visited his plantation at Bellevue in seventeen ninety-three, when Artillery here was but six years old."

"A part of this same parcel of land," said McIntosh, "now owned by me, originally bought by my cousin from John McQueen. My cousin was arrested by the Spanish governor, Quesado, and sent to Morro Castle in seventeen ninety-four. His crime?" McIntosh twirled the stem of his broken glass. "He refused to bend his knee to the Church of Rome, and claimed the right to correspond with Thomas Jefferson, discussing the idea that some day this province might belong to the United States by purchase and without a war, and the citizens in it safe and free."

"I remember it well," said Doctor Zeke. "He languished in the dungeons for a year until his wife, Mistress Sarah, persuaded George Washington to intervene."

"Then you'll remember Mistress Sarah was blind," McIntosh reminded him. "She died on St. Simon's Island in seventeen ninety-nine. Gentlemen, we Scots have a memory deep as the Firth of Forth. The insults we swallow rest like stones in our stomachs, to be regurgitated in years to come to make our children ill. This land I own has been paid for, as have my slaves and cattle, and the timber which I'm logging. Yet I'm constantly raided and harassed by Indians, pirates, runaway slaves, and Georgia border scum. I have relatives settled here with me in other houses. We sleep with sentries posted and work under guardsmen and lookouts. The only law is the law of force, and our lives are constant fear."

His cold eyes turned and fixed Artillery. "I need a man to visit and rouse other settlers, to point out to them that help may be had from the United States, who is anxious to annex this province. I need a man who can outwit the Spanish, to carry me messages to and from the St. Marys River. Do you follow me, sir?"

"Clearly," said Artillery.

"And you, Doctor Buckhart?"

"Aye," said Buckhart, "it's equally clear."

"I'll provide you with cattle, which you can take round the province, ostensibly for grazing. Your pay will be a dollar a day, American money, and found. Do you agree?"

Artillery looked at Doctor Zeke.

"You're most generous, sir," said Buckhart. "We agree."

McIntosh stood up. "I like you, sirs. You speak with the sureness and knowledge of age, Doctor Buckhart. And you with the courage of youth, and yet with caution, Mr. Armes. I'll mince no words. The imprisoning of my cousin has not been forgotten. The work that he started has not been finished. It's been taken up by me. I intend to strip Spain of this province, and be damned to the fact that her wily poltroons may know my intentions. We McIntoshes have a motto—'Touch Me Not But with a Glove.' She's touched my kin with dirty hands, sir. The man she'll have to answer to is me."

(2)

ARTILLERY PAUSED in the hallway, listening, and after a while the sound of snoring issued from Doctor Zeke's room. Satisfied, he went quietly down the stairs and out through the hall where two night candles had been left burning.

The trees in front of the mansion had been cut away to leave a clearing down to the edge of the river. Pine needles had gradually covered the ground, forming, in lieu of grass, a reddish, soft and springy needle-coated lawn which almost entirely hid the sandy soil. The river, silvered by moonlight, looked wide as the ocean, which lay a few miles east.

Artillery walked down to the edge of the bank and stared for a time at the bonnets moving seaward in the sluggish current. He knew quite well what had brought him out. It was not the lure of the scented breeze, nor the magic of the stars and moon. It had nothing to do with the fact that the night was warm and his room a trifle stuffy. Yet those were excuses that fitted, and salved his soul for tricking the tired old man.

He turned and looked at the sleeping house. It was all quite dark, except for a light in the lower hall. He had enjoyed Mistress McIntosh's playing after dinner. A Mr. Houston and his wife, Mary Ann, had dropped in. Introductions were made, and later Artillery had sung for them—Spanish songs that Damien had taught him, accompanying himself on his guitar. He loved to sing. The rolling Spanish verse was calming, and the power of his own full baritone could set his spirit free. He felt certain he was the only one who had noticed Dauna listening outside the window.

He picked up a stick and tossed it into the water. It gave a soft splash, and brought the steely surface to life in ever-widening rip-

ples. It was sad how men grew old and how little they learned. Marriage was furthest from his thoughts. He had Dan to avenge, and a nation to serve, and great deeds to do, and a fortune to make, and gold in his belt with which to make it. Black Cloud was the swiftest in the province, his tomahawk the sharpest, his pistols the most deadly. Singlehanded in a tavern brawl, he had bested a brute who was twice his size. Time enough, when he reached the age of McIntosh, to build a house like the one behind him and settle down.

Doctor Zeke was wrong.

He hated the girl. He stared upriver inland to where the slave huts were shining whitely. Beyond the huts, a small fire burned, denoting some vigilant watcher.

Adroitly, by following the evening's conversation, he had learned that Dauna slept in the big main house in a room next to that of her mistress. He wondered if her room was stuffy as his had been. He turned and strolled back toward the mansion, stopping to pluck an orange from a laden tree. He ripped the skin and sucked it. It proved bitter, so he tossed it away, watching it roll until it reached the bank of the river and tumbled in.

It would be nice to repulse her, nice to say, "Go! You're a stupid slave, fit only for bedding, and that I know is wrong."

He wandered back to the river bank, tore down some fistfuls of trailing moss, and made a seat to lean his back against a tree. The surface of the river was full of enchantment. It moved like time, carrying everything before it, yet always existing unchanged and unaffected by life or death while nations rose and waned upon its shore.

Wolf Creek and the swamp back of the compound had given him the selfsame feeling when he was a boy. His first real knowledge of life and love had started there. Now, where he sat, the creek had become part of the river, invisible but unforgotten. Like his life, its waters had mixed with other waters and broadened, and its swiftness had become more powerful while it slowed.

Dauna came, as he knew she would, and sat down beside him.

It was fitting and right that she did so. Life had patterns. A man was heated and melted and scraped of the dross by a hundred women he looked upon and never knew—those who danced before him, and some who sang, and others who touched him with hands and lips, and some who loved him unselfishly, and some who might be bought for gold. They were the furnace. When he was melted, his Maker's hand poured him swift to the waiting mold. There, maturity

cooled him. Experience clipped off the roughness. Like a bullet come through the furnace, he found himself best fitted for only one. Equally like the bullet, he knew no more when the process had ended than when it had begun.

"My mother and father were slaves," said Dauna. "Athena and Peter."

He shifted his position to escape the touch of her shoulder, but she seemed unconscious of his presence and went on talking to the river.

"I never knew my father. He was killed by raiders when I was a baby. I was reared in the home of Colonel John McIntosh, the cousin of my present master—the first four years at Bellevue, the rest of my life on his Georgia plantation, where they moved when he was released from Morro Castle. Mistress Sarah, who loved my mother like a daughter, was blind."

"They must have been good to you," Artillery said bitterly. He was thinking of Geronimo, and the fourteen wretches packed in the stinking warehouse in Fernandina, and the naked girl on the torture-pole in Drummond's camp.

She broke into his thoughts by saying, "No one could have been better. All slaves are not unhappy, Artillery." Her laugh was soft, and more gentle than mocking. "My mother died two years ago in Georgia. I came down here with Master John and Mistress Eliza. You're not even surprised that I speak in the best of English. I teach their daughter, Mary, who is visiting the colonel in Georgia now."

"Do your lessons given the child include the art of tussling?" Artillery demanded. "And the nice deportment of knocking and entering a visitor's room?"

"There's something about you nettles me." Dauna laughed again. "You've an air about you that would drive the most pious saint to vixenish means of kissing you."

"That's not true!" he protested. "And only one who is brazen would bring it to mind."

"Oh, but 'tis," she said lightly. "Your very flustering tells me others have tried it. You've been screened too long by the wealth of Doctor Buckhart's beard."

He hated her again, hated her brief for slavery and her impudent analysis of his inmost thoughts. No woman living had the right to strip a man of his *amour-propre* by dubbing him loutish and callow. Doctor Zeke was right. She marked herself as a slave girl by showing lack of knowledge and little understanding of people trained in modes genteel.

"I bid you good night," he said stiffly, and made a move as though to rise.

"*¡Hasta la noches!*" Her provoking grin flashed out again, heightening her devilish beauty in the moonlight. "I thought you'd leave and seek your room to offer up prayers for my wayward soul. It will make you feel pious and manly—and oh, so clean. Of course, the real reason for your going is that you actually understand what I mean."

"May you burn in hell!" He seized her and kissed the grin from her lips, bruising her mouth, letting his kisses wander. He pulled her closer, savoring each curve of her yielding body, reveling in the fact that within his arms she was helpless. Now it was not her, but her bondage he hated. He wanted her free, back in the forest, to run with the speed of a deer untrammeled.

The tears on her cheeks and the strength of her arms as she clung to him were stronger than words to tell him that this love was the first for both of them.

"*Querida mia,*" he whispered. "*Madonna.* My dear. My dear."

Then the laxness of moribund Spain broke in as he saw the boat which was creeping ashore. His arms dropped from her. He pointed, and covered her lips with his fingers. The craft was loaded with men. As it touched the bank some distance down, their stealthiness warned him, and the sight of faces, bestial, like those he had seen at Drummond's. He thought of the words of General Bowles—"Spain's not asleep; she's dying"—and some of the bitterness flooded him which had caused his host to smash a glass at the table. No peace. No property. No love. No life, without guns and pistols!

The lesson of the swamps came back, and the ever-living danger of woods and prairies. The savagery of his life responded. Like a wild thing trapped, he knew that the boatload was but part of the men who were closing in.

Birds were fluttering above the treetops in the distance, disturbed from their sleep. He had learned those tactics from Dan himself—that ring deployed in silence; a sentry dead without a sound; that rush on the post which found its defenders sleeping.

A shudder seized him, and for just an instant he trembled. He was sick with a premonition that his life had never known before—a feeling that death for someone he loved was near.

Dauna whispered, "They want the slaves, not cattle. You rouse the master, and I'll wake the cabins. There are guns and ball and powder in the closet by the fortepiano."

She had slipped off through the trees before he could stop her.

For an instant he thought to follow, hold her close, hide her in some tangled thicket, pressed against him for protection while the raid swirled on about them. Doctor Zeke's God must be possessed of a macabre sense of humor to flash a man's soul with the powder of passion, and deluge such a moment of glory and power with the scalding water of death and destruction.

His vacillation lasted but a second. Dauna ran no danger, for he knew quite well she could thread the concealing trees with the foxiness of Hasse Micco. As well try to catch and stop her as to pursue on foot a dodging rabbit. Meanwhile, he stood there maundering while her life and safety and the lives of others hung on his speedy action.

He knew the tactics of raiders—to shoot from ambush, create confusion, and not be seen, then strike with sudden speed at the weakest point while others of the band, strategically placed, made off with wanted booty under cover of the fighting.

The heat of a raid was the only time when blacks had the better of white men. Slaves had a monetary value, steadily rising in Georgia and Florida. Their own miserable bodies gave them protection merely because they were the booty, and consequently too valuable to be killed.

It was unlikely that the raiders would attack the house. Despite its tranquil appearance, like every other home in the province, it could be turned into an impromptu fortress in the wink of an eye. The diamond-shaped slits in the heavy shutters served not only for light but as loopholes well-adapted to protective firing.

The house was still dark, except for the downstairs hall, but the moonlit enclosure in front was as bright as day. Artillery decided against crossing it and making himself a target. One of the raiders landed from the boat might well be covering the clearing. He melted into the trees as Dauna had done, and started houseward, moving swiftly but in perfect silence.

He was nearly to the veranda when an errant ray of moonlight fell on a shining barrel. With a pang at spoiling his fine attire, Artillery dropped to his knees and circled, crawling with the stealth of a creeping cougar. He came up in back of a giant half-breed, crouched and moving on the house, his musket held at ready. Scorning all the niceties, since he had been fool enough to venture out without tomahawk, knife, or pistol, Artillery half rose and jumped for the man's broad shoulders, hooking one arm in a strangling hold beneath the marauder's chin. With killing force, his knee jammed into the black man's spine and his circling arm jerked upward.

There was one sharp crack of breaking bone, and the man fell forward, quite dead with a broken neck and shattered spine.

Artillery paused just long enough to strip him of knife and pistols and gun. On the porch, he hugged the shadow of the wall until he was safe inside the front door. There he blew out the candles and made for the stairs.

Doctor Zeke was still snoring when Artillery entered his bedroom, but he waked at a touch and asked no question when Artillery said, "Raiders." Instead, he was on his feet like some ghostly white shadow, searching for clothes and pistols, powder horn and gun.

"Wake our host, lad," Doctor Zeke ordered, but before he finished speaking the night outside was shattered by shots and a winding horn.

The light of a candle showed in the hall. Bare feet pattered, and John Houston McIntosh sped by the door in a flapping nightshirt, clutching breeches and boots in his hand. He was on the stairs when Doctor Zeke and Artillery reached the hall, in time to see Mistress Eliza, white but calm, holding a candle to light them. Her hair was down, cascading in back of a ruffled nightgown.

Shots broke out a distance away. Mingled with them came the boom of a larger gun.

"Godspeed you, gentlemen," said Mistress Eliza, unmoving. "I'm glad you're here to help us, and my daughter away."

Doctor Zeke and Artillery went down the stairs to where McIntosh was taking guns from the closet to stand them in line against the fortepiano.

Artillery moved to help him, and McIntosh said, "My apologies, sirs. I dreamed not at supper tonight that your work would start so soon. If you'll take out the rest of the guns, Mr. Armes, I'll clothe myself. The Scotchman fights well in his kilties, but any man's easy prey, sir, when caught with his breeches down. There are twenty-five muskets there, Mr. Armes, all primed and loaded."

He tucked his nightshirt into his breeches and handed Artillery a pouch of ball and a silver-mounted powder horn. His keen eyes fell on the gun that Artillery had stripped from the raider. "That's a Spanish musket you're carrying, Mr. Armes. You'd best leave it here and take eight of mine which come from Georgia. Then you're sure to find a proper fit of ball."

Heavy brogues clattered through the hall, and a short, stocky Spaniard, chattering with excitement, burst into the room.

"Praise Mary, you're alive, senors! They've breached our wall in the first attack, and twenty of our slaves from the outermost cabins

are gone. We've closed the breach, but they seem to be heavy in numbers, and without help I fear we can't hold it long. There are shots from all around, Senor McIntosh, and even a few from the river."

"This is Pedro, my overseer, sirs."

The man knuckled his forehead, not paying much attention. "You must hurry, Senor McIntosh. Senor Houston and nine others with fourteen blacks who handle guns are holding our defenses, but they are spread too wide, and there must be fifty or more against us."

"This young man will go with you, Pedro. Doctor Buckhart and I will inspect the stockade and see which points are most in need of reinforcing. Mr. Armes has eight muskets. You take eight more. Sixteen new guns should help you hold the breach. If necessary, put some of the wenches to loading."

"*Si, senor.*" Pedro scooped up eight of the muskets, and Artillery, holding eight more, followed him out through the hall.

Outside, the firing was sharper. They walked to the west end of the long veranda and climbed the rail to escape the risk of the moonlit clearing. Pedro led the way down a path through the woods which skirted the stables. The firing dwindled, then broke out fresh.

"You say they've taken twenty slaves?" Artillery asked, and felt that he knew the answer before Pedro spoke.

"Fourteen bucks and six wenches, senor."

Artillery had felt it by the river, and felt it now again—that flutter of his heart and nerves that portended a night when the fates were angry, a night fraught full with tragedy, when everything bad that could happen would happen. It was the feeling which had clutched him on the night that Dan was taken. He walked on slowly after Pedro, overwhelmed by a prescience that made his skin and his hair roots crawl.

"The wenches are less in value."

"*Si, senor.* Except for the housegirl, Dauna."

"I thought she slept near her mistress." Now both throat and tongue were dry.

"She came to warn the cabins, senor, and was seized in the rush when the raiders broke the wall. She's beautiful, senor, and of such a lightness, she'll bring much money in the marts of Georgia, or when bid for by the planters of Louisiana."

"Unless she's killed," Artillery suggested.

The Spaniard shrugged. "One does not kill a fortune, senor. 'Tis talk in the quarters, the girl's a virgin. That, with her paleness,

might raise her price to two thousand American dollars. Perhaps much more—*quien sabe?* She'll be nurtured with care, for any harm will cause her price to fall."

Artillery walked on in silence, by forcing one foot to place itself before the other. Death was the only thing certain in life. Born in battle, it seemed ordained that everything he learned to cherish must die.

3

A FEW MINUTES later, they reached a place where sweating blacks were piling bags of grain to reinforce a rampart that filled a space broken in the wall of outward-pointing palmettoes. A white man lay writhing on the ground, his left arm shattered, a black girl in attendance. The heavy gun Artillery had heard boomed out again, cutting three of the topmost bags to ribbons. Someone screamed, and a shower of grain began to fall.

"Langrage," said Artillery.

"*Si, senor.*" Pedro crossed himself. " 'Twas that and surprise that breached the wall."

"Do you have no cannon to answer?"

"No, senor. Senor McIntosh felt that men and muskets and vigilance were strong enough to resist all attacks behind this wall. But these savages have brought a heavy gun."

"They're not savages," Artillery said shortly. "Indians do not fight that way. We're facing a band of Georgia scum. Their tactics, and a six-pounder dragged to the scene of a raid where they know only muskets face them, have caused many a compound stronger than this to fall."

There was a yell outside, and heavier firing in answer from the men defending.

McIntosh hurried up, carrying muskets which he handed to Pedro to be passed along to the harassed defenders. Shots came in the distance on the other side of the house.

McIntosh cocked his head in listening, and said, "Doctor Buckhart's gone there. There's a swamp lies to the northward, and some of these dastards must have crawled into it. Doctor Buckhart thinks it's nothing. He's gotten his mare, Savanna, and claims, by riding up and down and firing, he can give the appearance of many men defending, and will release those I have posted there."

"He's right, sir," said Artillery. "It's a ruse, from the sound, by no more than half a dozen of the attackers. They hope to draw many more than their number away from this breach. They seem to have but a single big gun, sir."

" 'Tis enough to play the devil," McIntosh muttered. "What think you they'll do?"

"Wear us down till nearly dawn," Artillery said thoughtfully, "and then when we're tired, attack full force against this weakened breach." His blue eyes met the Scotchman's. "I have a plan, sir. There's but one road from here to the Cowford—is that true?"

McIntosh nodded.

"Then the slavers, with their captives, will be already on their way. Suppose they were attacked, sir, some distance from here. 'Twould be necessary for some of these raiders who are pressing us now to go to their aid."

Firing broke out redoubled, and McIntosh turned his eyes to the top of the piled-up grain bags. "You speak as a man who dreams, Mr. Armes. We're outnumbered badly—two, or maybe three, to one. Were I to entertain such a harebrained idea, I would have to select a party and mount them on my swiftest horses. 'Twould then be necessary to ride in a circuit through tangled woods for at least four miles, and possibly more. I need every man I have to defend my home, sir. I think you'll admit that in the face of the odds against us, no such party leaving this compound would ever get through."

"No such party would, sir," said Artillery. "But one man can."

McIntosh turned his face back slowly. "Do you fancy riding to your death, sir?"

"More than waiting here for it," said Artillery. "One plantation I've heard of was attacked for as long as seven weeks, to be at last despoiled and burned. Their defenses were stronger, and they had but half as many slaves as you to be taken as booty. Let the raiders worry about catching me, sir. I can slip through their lines if you'll let me. My safety lies then entirely on what you do."

For a moment, McIntosh stiffened. Then he slowly leaned forward in a formal bow. "I come from a family of soldiers, sir. They've taken orders many times from men not half so brave as you."

"Your servant, sir," said Artillery. "I should make this ride in less than an hour. When you hear my firing start at a distance, give the attackers outside about quarter of an hour to weaken their ranks by sending assistance. In the meantime, slowly thin your ramparts, sir, by taking some of the grain bags down. When you're ready, mass

all your men together, tear down the remaining grain bags, and charge. I think you'll rout them."

"I think I will myself," said McIntosh, "for surely God will be on our side if in His wisdom He sees fit to get you through."

The years and the lessons of Dan McKetch had taught Artillery the penalties of thoughtless haste. When he found Black Cloud in the stables, he checked every phase of his own equipment before he saddled, painstakingly taking his time. When the saddle was on her, he pulled the latigos with a strong and steady pull, tightening the cinches with evenness beneath the mare's smooth belly. She had always been fretful and skittish under bad saddling, but her nervousness and her mettlesome spirit were what gave her the speed that showed heels to nearly any steed of similar size and weight.

The pistols Artillery had taken from the half-breed proved poorly wrought. He kept them, for in the maneuver he planned he needed noise more than accuracy of fire. He took his rifle from the saddle boot and left it in the barn, substituting one of the four muskets he carried. He dismounted at the house and ran upstairs to get his own pistols and tomahawk from his room.

Back in the saddle, he disposed the weapons about him as best he might. Four pistols and four loaded guns made for clumsy riding, but there would be no time for reloading once he overtook the band of slaves and their captors, if he was to give the impression that six or more men had somehow ambushed the party.

He heard three shots to the westward, answered by three more, and headed Black Cloud towards them. He reined in at a spot where a black was standing, his musket laid atop a four-foot wall.

"Have you been shooting?"

"No, senor. There are bramble bushes on the other side, and thorn trees. No one has tried to get through there."

"How close to the wall do the bushes come?"

"About the length of two horses, senor."

"Is the ground there firm?"

"It's sandy, senor."

"*Buenos.*" Artillery fell back, wheeled Black Cloud and touched her ribs with his heels. She took her stride and sailed like a buck deer over the four-foot wall. She had scarcely touched when he urged her into a run, skirting the thicket eastward on the outside of the wall.

The thorn trees shortly gave way to pines. Artillery wheeled right, and Black Cloud reared. Not ten yards away a figure stood half concealed by a tree. At sight of Artillery, he raised a musket and

fired point-blank. Artillery's right ear felt the heat of the ball. His left arm weighted with muskets and only his right hand free, Artillery found no time to level a gun and fire. Instead, he turned Black Cloud and charged. The man stepped out, searching his waist for a pistol. Fifteen feet from him, Artillery pulled his tomahawk and threw.

The man went down.

With a touch of the reins, Black Cloud swerved in a circle. As he passed the man a second time, Artillery leaned dangerously far from the saddle, grasped the upright golden haft, and jerked out the blade that had partly cleft the dead man's skull.

An instant later, the woods closed in. He was slowed for a time, but soon found an opening where woods met swamp and the palmetto bushes grow low. The narrow swamp, bordering the land where John Houston McIntosh was logging, extended two miles from east to west, bending slightly northward in a bow. Low in the saddle, Artillery galloped along its length, judging his speed and general direction by the sinking moon. Once he thought he heard hoofbeats behind him, but the ground was soft, and the tricky swamp made a sounding board that was full of echoes.

Always when he rode, his mind galloped with him, never exactly part of him, but seeming to ride along beside him like some disembodied counsellor, menacing his happiness from the back of another mare. When he rode through peaceful pastures in the sunlight, his reflections were usually serene, like the countryside, somnolent in the noonday.

A storm brought him frenzied emotions which caused him dismay.

Tonight, he rode in battle. The palms of his hands were clammy from killing, and the night was still and hot and malign. Garbled contemplations plagued him—reflections tangled as the matted depths of the swamp beside him. He wished he might ignore them, for he found them impenetrable, and impossible to understand.

Did a God exist? If so, what manner of creature was He? Fulfillment of love had been snatched from his arms, and in an instant his urge for life had been warped into an urge for killing. Was this the work of some all-wise Being, who spread the lushness of nature about with such a lavish hand?

Whose God was He? Doctor Zeke's and Amy's? Was He private to John Houston McIntosh, and did He sit on a golden throne up above and writhe in anger at the insults to the families of that Scotch clan? Was He white or black? Man or woman? Soldier or priest? Had He protected Doctor Ezekiel Buckhart, who talked with Him

nightly in humble prayer, and overlooked the red men, and ignored the blacks, born to a life of whip and chain?

Maybe He was a royal God, related to His Most Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain. The Spanish banners might well be red. They were stained with the blood of a million natives, slaughtered on islands and mainland, and torn from their homes in the Indies to be sold on the blocks as slaves to Spain. Two centuries and a half before, the beach at Matanzas Inlet had been stained with the blood from two hundred slit throats of recusant Lutherans, massacred in His name.

Tonight, it was just the same. Doctor Zeke had taught Artillery, *Thou shalt not kill.* Yet twice in an hour, two human beings had gone to their end beneath his murderous skill. Why? Because men could never be satisfied? Or was it white men?

McIntosh had slaves and property. Other white men wanted those slaves and that property for their own. Spain had reached out for centuries, forcing people by fire and sword to think and worship as Spain had thought and worshiped.

Now, a new country was growing stronger, reaching out for part of Spain to teach people who lived there freedom—a white man's freedom, of course, but a better freedom than England, France, or Spain could have, because it was wedded irretrievably to the Union, as the Church was wedded to Spain. As Spain would fight blindly for her Catholic creed, so the United States would fight for her freedom—not necessarily because it was the best, but because it was her own.

Artillery remembered that the ancient people of Syria and Palestine gave their gods the names of towns or natural objects or ways of thinking. There was no god of love over everyone. Each town and each tribe had a god of its own, and was ready to back it with fire and sword, as Spain had done—and the names of those gods were Melkarth, and Moloch, and Beelzebub. Yet there really weren't many, for all of them stood for greed and hate, and put together their name was Baal, and Baal was only one.

Deep in his heart, Artillery knew he would always have to kill, and that everything he loved would be taken from him, and that like Dan McKetch, McIntosh, and Doctor Zeke, and General Bowles, and Cheti Haiola, and Dauna, he could have no peace, except through his skill with the weapons he carried until the worship of Baal was done.

He galloped along on his mission, but his heart was heavy, and he felt that he rode alone.

He was near the end of the swampland when he saw a stretch that was thinned of trees by logging. He must have covered three miles or more, for he had pushed Black Cloud to cruel speed. He felt he was safe now and headed for the river road. The progress of a party with twenty slaves weighted down in chains must necessarily be slow.

The clearing ended, and once more pine trees thickened. He was getting close to the river road. He slowed Black Cloud to her dainty walk, and stroked the length of her sweaty neck. Fifteen minutes of picking his way through the forest, and he stopped. Ahead was a glint of moonlight on the river. The strip of sand which marked the trail along its bank showed clear in dusky silver.

He hoped he was right, for he needed light for his strategy, and the setting moon was already touching the treetops, soon to disappear. For a while, he listened. Hearing nothing, he quickly dismounted and stacked the muskets against a tree. Out on the road, he bent, examined the sand, and quickly decided he had overridden. No party of chain-laden slaves on foot had recently passed by. He collected his muskets and, skirting the road and the shelter of trees, he rode slowly back toward Fort George Plantation.

He had traveled less than a quarter of a mile when he heard the first sounds of his quarry. He sat quite still in his screen of trees. Two horsemen rode in advance of the party, and he let them pass. The slaves came then, chained and tramping in single file, the women bringing up the rear, so that the men in front might drag them if they faltered. He caught one glimpse of a handkerchief of vivid green.

The driver was a Negro, corded with muscles, apish of face, and over six feet tall. He cracked a whip as Artillery watched, and one of the women, slower than the others, answered with a plaintive cry.

Artillery shot him, and was galloping toward the column head before he had time to watch the Negro die. He threw the empty musket away and fired again without stopping to aim, halting the two horsemen who had turned to speed back toward the column. They shot toward the woods from where he had fired, but Black Cloud already had him near the column's rear. Two more horsemen rode there. Apparently, that was all. Artillery wounded one of them with a pistol, and hamstrung the horse beneath the other with a musket ball.

A moment later, he was back—in time to send a shot above the head of the struggling slaves, who were screaming loudly to add to

the din and confusion. Satisfied for the moment, he galloped off into the woods again, swept in a circle out onto the road, and drove Black Cloud full speed toward the head of the column.

The three remaining horsemen had gotten together. Artillery fired at them blindly, felt the whistle of lead as they all replied, then swung to the left, and drove through the trees. Black Cloud reared and spun on her heels, in time for him to drop one of the reloading riders with a musket ball.

Something wrenched at his shoulder, turning him sideways. He looked at his helpless left arm in surprise. It had been holding muskets a second before, and now they were glittering on the ground, and his arm was holding nothing at all. The sleeve of his coat was ripped and torn, and dark with a spreading stain.

He felt dizzy, and knew at once that he had been a little silly. He should have learned that what he thought of, others might think of, too. The raiders had guards that rode the woods as well as those who covered the column on the open trail.

Artillery turned his head very slowly, feeling that life was close to its end. He was ringed by horsemen, two with leveled muskets, two reloading, and one with a raised pistol—five in all. He had heard somewhere a saying, "Those that live by the sword, so shall they fall." Or was it, "so shall they perish"? He closed his knees tighter on Black Cloud and waited for the slowly rising pistol to fire.

There were pounding hoofs in the woods behind him. Another was coming.

He couldn't move when Savanna charged into the circle. Under the blasts of Doctor Zeke's twin pistols, the men with the leveled muskets went down together before they could fire. Doctor Zeke's beard was flying behind him, whipped out like a miniature whirl of snow caught in some wintry squall. The rider with the pistol fired. Moving in trancelike slowness, Artillery's fingers clutched his knife, and threw it. The rider looked surprised as red blood bubbled out of his throat and gushed in a stream down his hairy chest. He sat still for a moment, swaying, then slowly toppled out of his saddle.

The reloading horsemen turned and fled.

A ball crashed in from the roadway. Savanna stopped short in half a turn, crumpling sideways into a useless heap. Somehow, Doctor Zeke jumped clear. The lesser pop of a pistol sounded. Doctor Zeke's white beard showed a spot of red. Then, as though he were going to sleep, the old man took a step toward his fallen mare, and suddenly lay down.

Artillery galloped toward the road. Hoofbeats padded in the sand, and he was just in time to see the tail of a running horse of dapple gray. He knew the looks of horses better than the looks of people. He had seen that horse several weeks before, hitched to the step rail of McKetch's house in the compound. He'd know it again when he saw it, and its owner, too—Don Jose de Reduro.

He rode back into the trees again, dismounted, and knelt by the still old man. He brushed back the thick white hair and closed the blue eyes with his fingers. Savanna raised her head and stirred. Artillery bent and kissed the white spot on the mare's smooth forehead, then put his pistol to the place he had kissed and fired.

"Go with him," he said, "and hurry. Wherever he's going, he'll need you when he has a call."

4

THREE MEN IN small boats were busy herding a hundred and fifty head of cattle across, keeping the swimming beasts in line with yells and prodding poles. The water was ninety feet in depth, but the crossing was at the narrowest point of the river. The few unpainted weather-stained houses of the Cowford lay behind Artillery. "Wacca Pilatka," the Indians had named it—"cows crossing over." The last time he had sat in that place astride Black Cloud, he had called through the night for Dan. Now it was early in the morning, and with February the weather had turned damp and cold.

He sat quite still, staring at Fort San Nicholas on the opposite bank, and gently rubbing his arm. The wound had completely healed after three months of Mistress McIntosh's sympathetic ministrations, but it pained him now from the penetrating cold.

He was grateful for the greatcoat given him by McIntosh. It was of dark olive green and fell below the tops of his Hessian riding boots. Twelve plated buttons and three frogs fastened it snugly in front, and the five silk-lined capes, hanging in layers about his shoulders, were not only dashing, but served to keep the wind from his wounded arm.

His new high-crowned riding hat with its narrow brim made him feel silly, but McIntosh had pointed out that if he was to be effective in his work, it was necessary that his dress betoken a man of importance. The silver-buttoned blue coats made by Amy were still impressive, although one of them had been ruined by the musket

ball. Artillery had given in far enough to relegate his treasured plumed hat to the saddlebags for the present.

Yes, he was certainly a figure of importance in the province—soldier and adventurer, a strategist whose brave maneuvers had routed the invaders and saved the whole Fort George plantation, except for twenty slaves, who had vanished with the retreating attackers.

Watching the swimming cattle, his lips were drawn and his blue eyes narrowed, but not from cold or pain. For just an instant, his youthful face had the look of a man who had seen life's sands run out in the glass. It was hard for him to realize that something less than two months before, at Christmas, Mistress Eliza had baked him a cake when he turned eighteen.

He had been projected into a vacuum, an existence more trackless than the deepest swamp. Life should lie ahead of him, alluring and beckoning, leading him on to pastures green. Instead, it seemed to lie behind, hemmed in by tragedy and markers over new-made graves—"The Father of Artillery Armes," "The Mother of Artillery Armes."

Even General Bowles had gone, for word had come to McIntosh a month before that the doughty Bowles, refusing to eat, had died in Morro Castle, loyal to England to the last and firm in his hatred of Spain. The Governor General of Cuba, hearing that Bowles was dying, had sent word that he wished to see him. "I am sunk low indeed," Bowles had sent back, "but not so low as to receive the Governor General of Cuba."

Dan was there in Morro, too. Artillery wondered if Dan had heard what Bowles had offered to Spain as a final insult. He could almost hear Dan's laugh boom out as he yelled, "Hell's lead! There speaks a man of courage! God rest you, William! Hell must be full of Spanish forts we can raid together, and Ezekiel and I will soon be joining you."

So the cycle between those first two graves and the last had ended. The last was in a corner of the big Fort George plantation, and the soil above it still looked piled and new. Artillery himself had carved the marker:

Dr. Ezekiel Buckhart
and
Savanna
October 5, 1805
Resting for the Trumpet's Call

He felt he had stayed at the McIntoshes' plantation too long. Despite the death of Doctor Zeke, which had shocked him into numbness, his convalescence had been more than pleasant. He had ridden over the great plantation with its master, been shown the logging operations and the endless pine trees boxed to receive the oozing resin which supplied the Scotchman's heavy trade in naval stores and turpentine. He had passed on to McIntosh many hints for raising cotton and tobacco. Later, a ship arrived from Fernandina, and he helped the Scotchman unload and mount six heavy guns, of which word would soon seep through the province.

The other families liked him. He had never known a home before. He found himself charmed with evenings of quiet talk and tuneful song.

He was not surprised when the Scotchman called him into the sunny living room one morning, poured him a glass of the amber whisky, and asked him to sit down.

"Your health, sir." McIntosh raised his own glass.

"And yours, sir. You've been most kind. I regret I've not been able to be about your business, sir. I fear that Mistress McIntosh is spoiling me by overpampering of a trifling wound."

McIntosh drained his drink and went to the chair behind his desk and answered. "You're a strange young man, and possessed of a wealth of modesty," he said so warmly that Artillery felt himself color. "I find you're not only a soldier, but that you're skilled in many other things—languages, books, and music; logging, grazing, naval stores, and agriculture."

"I've Doctor Zeke to thank for that, sir—and for the fact that I'm alive today."

"The Lord is just," said McIntosh. "When he took your father and mother, He saw fit to place you under the care of an extraordinary man. Doctor Buckhart died as he wished, with pistols blazing, fighting for someone he loved and a cause he thought just. May I meet my end the same some day, rather than be laid waste by a passing fever."

His strong fingers drummed on the desk top. "Damn it, sir, a Scotchman's words dry up within him when he tries to talk for a woman. My wife is far better fitted than I to say what I have to say." He left the desk, clasped his hands in back underneath his long-tailed coat, and began to pace the floor. "We're lonesome here, young man. I have a young daughter, and she's away in Georgia with her uncle. Her teacher, a slave girl I'd intended to free, was taken in the raid. 'Twill become necessary now, I fear, that my daughter stay in

Georgia for her school. The thought has struck us that you may be lonesome, too."

"I am, sir."

"Then please to consider this place your home," said McIntosh abruptly. "It's obviously in need of one more skilled than I to protect it. Since you've done so, and it stands intact today through your efforts, 'tis only just that a part of its profits should be your own." He came forward and put a hand on Artillery's shoulder.

"What I did was not done for profit, sir."

"It's for that reason," said McIntosh slowly, "that what I'm offering you would only be offered to one I consider my son. There's a room in this house for you always, and a call on my purse, should you need it. Should you care to stay when you see fit to marry, you may settle here, and I'll build you a house of your own."

"You're far too kind, sir." Artillery was touched so deeply, he could scarcely speak. "But I stayed in the province at the behest of Marshal Quentin, who said you had work to be done. Your offer's doubly tempting to one who is lonely and unhappy, but I learned something the other night which may cause you to hasten your plans."

"What's that, sir?" McIntosh stepped back and lowered his hand.

"The attack on Fort George was not entirely the work of raiders. Nor was it made without the knowledge of some of the officials of Spain. I recognized the horse ridden by the man who killed Doctor Buckhart—a dapple gray belonging to Don Jose de Reduro. I am certain that Reduro rode him, although the rider wore no Spanish uniform."

"May his black soul wither and burn in hell!" McIntosh pounded a fist in his palm. "He collects from the settlers at random in the name of the king. In order to settle here on lands which we rightfully own, Mr. Armes, Reduro is the man we've had to pay. Now I have to make good to McQueen on nine slaves taken. I rented them from him at a hundred and twenty dollars a head each year."

"A serious loss, sir." Artillery stood up. "But I'm afraid that here I would be helpless to further anything which might cause the release of Dan McKetch before he dies in Morro Castle or to avenge this raid, if that be possible. Now I have the death of the man I loved best in the world to avenge as well. You've offered me a home and the honor of your own affection and that of Mistress Eliza. Some day I may accept that, sir. Right now, driven by a double mission, I must refuse."

"Your determination does you credit, Mr. Armes." McIntosh

returned to his chair behind the desk. "May I give you an affectionate warning which stems from my Scottish caution?"

"It would be an honor, sir."

"Beware of hotheadedness. You're highly skilled in the use of arms. That skill may be a two-edged sword to one who is young."

"Doctor Zeke has always warned me about that, too."

"Well, he's right, young man. Honor is a word that's bandied about lightly by assassins. Lacking it themselves, they find it handy to goad a victim into an easy killing. We McIntoshes unfortunately are not free of the stigma. My uncle, Lachlan, killed Button Gwinnett in a duel, and my cousin, Colonel McIntosh, whom my daughter is visiting now, carries useless sword scars from Captain Elholm, a Pole in Lee's Legion." McIntosh clenched his fist on the desk. "Not only was Alexander Hamilton lost to the United States, but dueling wiped out his eldest son in eighteen hundred and one."

"I've heard of Alexander Hamilton's death, but I didn't know about his son."

"History will prove that Hamilton's death was a devastating loss to the United States," McIntosh continued. "While I disagreed with the policy of Mr. Hamilton's Federalist Party, I recognized his ability. The United States will also suffer a loss, Mr. Armes, in the disgrace of a man as brilliant as Aaron Burr, for his career is ruined today. Unless I mistake this Reduro's type, he'll never personally fight you, but his *spadassins* are many. One thing I insist on—that you remain here with us until your wound's entirely healed."

"Your kindness, sir, has already made me overstay."

"Nonsense." McIntosh leaned back in his chair. "When you leave here, what are your plans, Mr. Armes?"

"They are yours, sir."

"You've changed my plans some with this news of Don Jose." McIntosh's fingers drummed on the desk. "Did you think of seeking news of McKetch in St. Augustine?"

"I had thought so, sir."

"And also that you might inadvertently encounter Don Jose?"

"If I meet him, I meet him, sir. With the passport I hold, I can see no reason for keeping out of his way."

"There is none," said McIntosh thoughtfully, "so long as you keep tight rein on your head and your tongue. Unfortunately, the passport you carry gives you less immunity from trouble here than it might in Spain."

Artillery protested, "But it's signed by the king."

"Whose addlepate, for all his faults, still holds a single grain of wisdom." McIntosh gave a grim smile. "He's wise enough not to impinge on the authority of his loyal governors. Just as all land grants must be approved by Governor White, so might even a royal passport be questioned. Your passport will get you into St. Augustine, but if you seek trouble there, it may not get you out again."

"I'll be careful," said Artillery.

"I trust your discretion, Mr. Armes." McIntosh hitched himself toward the desk and began to write. "Here's a note of introduction," he said when the missive was sanded. "It's to a kinsman of mine, a Daniel Hulbert, who with his good wife, Sarah, and his daughter, Bethany, has recently taken up residence in St. Augustine."

He held the note in his hand for a moment, then tore it in four and dropped it into a basket beside him. "I should practice what I preach about discretion. It's better that you carry no writing from me. Hulbert has a small grove near Maria Sanchez Creek on the west side of the town. You'll be stopped by sentries at the city gates. Give them your business boldly. You have money. Say that you're there for the purpose of purchasing slaves and cattle, if any which suit you can be found. The sentries will take you first to the governor. Make no mention of me or Hulbert, and be cautious how you inquire for Hulbert once you're safely in town."

"What is the best way to find him, sir?"

McIntosh leaned back, stared at the ceiling, then sat up straight again. "There's a wine shop, La Candiotera, a short distance up the main street from the city gates. Go there and you'll meet a buxom German wench by name of Ellen. She's a widow."

"How shall I meet her, sir?"

McIntosh said, "Damn it, young man, one doesn't meet such women; they meet you. They serve a purpose because they have strong hates and acquire a certain amount of proficiency in satisfying the carnal lusts which sometimes beset us all. You can trust this wench up to and including about a liter of wine, so long as she thinks you're intent upon plotting the early downfall of Spain. She'll tell you where Hulbert can be found, and rob you neatly, I promise, should you be so foolish as to be fired by her cozening. Beyond that, she may be useful should you wish to get in touch with me, or I with you."

"And what shall I tell Mr. Hulbert, sir?"

"Tell him of the raid and the loss of my slaves, and Don Jose's part in the affair. See if you can get the names of a hundred settlers in the province who will strike with me to free Florida from Spain.

He'll know far better than I if this can be done, and also if this is the time."

"And what of the messages you wish me to carry from here to the St. Marys and back again?"

"Those will come," said McIntosh, "if this is the time."

Under Mistress McIntosh's insistence, Artillery had tarried two weeks longer.

A murmur of voices sounded over the water. Brought back to himself again, he saw that the cattle had been landed on the other side and that two Indians were putting in toward him, skillfully balancing their tipsy canoe. He snuggled closer into his cloaks, cursing the impetuousness which had set him forth from Fort George plantation on such a bitter day.

The Indians, when they landed, stood looking at him dumbly, failing to understand his request for a ferry in any one of four languages, until his price had gone up to a peso. Immediately, on his showing of the coin, both Creeks brightened into quick activity, making arrangements for him to settle himself amidships and giving him directions in Spanish as good as his own for the disposal of his saddle and bags.

Their blankness returned when Artillery, safe on the other side, and rubbing down Black Cloud's dripping flanks, became incensed at their highwayman price and their standing by without so much as raising a hand to help and consigned them both to the lowest ledge of some particularly sulphurous Indian hell. His invective was acknowledged merely by both ferrymen returning to their craft and shoving off in dignified silence.

He was glad when Black Cloud was thoroughly dried and saddled again. He felt better, for the vigorous rubbing he had given the mare had brought some warmth to his own body as well. The King's Road followed the bank before it turned southeast beside the triangular wooden walls of Fort San Nicholas, where the scattered huts of the cantonment spread out around the structure, two hundred and fifty yards from the river.

The fringe of palms along the river's edge was lost to sight as he entered the cloistered green tunnel through a bayhead. There he was forced to unbutton his greatcoat, for the air was moist and rose up heated from the rotting vegetation. He was nearly through the tunnel when Black Cloud's ears went up, and he reined her in.

Ahead, he could see that the road was clearer, running through stunted palmetto bushes and Spanish bayonets, yellow under

the morning sun. He was crossing over a tiny creek when he heard the rattle of arms and harness. The only opening around him was the course of the creek bed, narrow and matted thick with vines. He turned Black Cloud in the trickling shallow water, and hastily backed her in. The vines swung closed to form a thick protecting trellis.

He sat there unmoving while a detachment of five dragoons rode by in single file. When he judged they were safely out of hearing, he left his place of hiding and took up his journey again.

Out in the open and free of the tunnel, his conduct began to rankle. He was acting like a simpering lass, vaporish with shyness. Four months before, the wings of death had brushed him lightly and left him unmoved. He was riding, at his own behest, straight into the stronghold of the Spanish. He would prove weak indeed if he found in five detached dragoons some cause for fear.

He touched his heels to Black Cloud's sides and she took up her space-eating canter. He knew quite well what the trouble was, but hated to admit it. He was all alone, faced for the first time in his life with a need of thinking and making decisions. Quentin and McIntosh trusted him, and on his skill and ingenuity might hang the fate of a province, or even the fate of a nation. Would they trust him so much if they knew that inside he bled from an unhealed wound of loneliness and indecision?

Accomplishment was easy when you rode on a mission flanked by Black Storm and Savanna and the wisdom of their riders. It was not so easy when riding alone openly to flaunt authority. He could listen now until ears were numb, but he would be listening for hoofbeats he could never hear.

He passed the ruins of many plantations abandoned by the British. One deserted project, grown up already into trees and semi-jungle, seemed even larger than Fort George, which Mistress McIntosh had told Artillery cost her husband nearly thirty thousand dollars when purchased from McQueen. Farther on, he passed a great logging operation where thousands of feet of yellow pine and cypress were stacked to dry.

The sight of Negroes busy at work and apparently happy with song began to raise his spirits. Some day he might own such a sawmill himself. He had money, and certainly had never done anything to run afoul of the Spanish law. Life lay ahead, new and wonderful. If Doctor Zeke and Dan had left him anything, it cer-

tainly should be courage enough to face his destiny now that he was on his own.

He stopped in a hammock at noontime, shot two chattering squirrels, which he spitted and broiled, and washed them down with a pannikin of tea. The cold turned into tingling stimulation under the strength of the afternoon sun.

When he forded Black Cloud through a rushing creek and left the last darkness of a three-mile swamp behind him, it was late in the afternoon. With a deal of pride, he reached in his pocket and produced a present which McIntosh had given him before his departure. It was a watch of turnip size, its case of heavy silver embossed with a London scene. Its hands showed after five, confirming a guess he had made with startling accuracy by the height of the setting sun.

Ahead of him, in a clearing, stood a rambling verandahed building. In front of the porch, three horses were hitched to a rail. A weather-beaten sign proclaimed, "*La Posada Media.*" His journey to St. Augustine was half over.

Secure in his new-found independence, he decided to spend the night as befitted a wealthy traveler. He tied Black Cloud to the hitching-rail and went into the Halfway Inn.



5

"BIENVENIDO, senor! Bienvenido!"

The fattest man Artillery had ever seen came forward, rubbing his hands and trying to collapse his bloated belly in an impossible bow. His neck disappeared beneath his wide, dirty stock in a series of rippling chins. His once-black hair was sparse and tangled. Piggy eyes and a button nose were sunk deep in a pair of puffy cheeks, crisscrossed by reddened veins.

"Your humble host, senor—Juan Jimenez. *Bienvenido!* Welcome to my humble inn."

Three men were seated about a roaring fire of lighter knots which flared in the drafty fireplace at the rear of the thirty-foot room. A large cauldron, suspended from a black iron arm was pushed in near the flames to simmer. Its steam mixed with the gusts of smoke. To the right of the fireplace hung pots and pans, and to the left, vegetables, garlic, onions, and peppers were drying

colorfully on a line. Three long boards, supported by trestles and flanked by homemade wooden benches, formed a single wine-stained table along one side of the room. The other was occupied almost solidly with stacked-up casks of wine.

The three men turned as Artillery came in. The tallest wore a heavy, homespun smock, and his knee-length boots of heavy leather, coated thick with grayish, dried mud, proclaimed him a worker in swamps and forest.

The second sported two-color boots, ornate with heavy Spanish spurs. The pistol stuck in his belt was fine, and his kerseymere breeches looked worn from time in the saddle. His dark, thick jacket was tight and without revers. Artillery rightly judged him to be a grazier.

The smallest of the three, an emaciated shrimp of a man, with swarthy skin and hollowed cheeks, was clad entirely in a filthy suit of doeskin and wore moccasins. A hat, made of a skunk, with head, feet, and tail still attached, was pushed far back on his matted hair. A rifle almost as fine as Artillery's lay beside his chair.

Artillery said, "If you can give me lodging, Senor Jimenez, I'll spend the night. I'm on my way to St. Augustine."

"The best, the best!" Juan Jimenez attempted to bow again. "You're wise, senor—" He paused.

"Armes. Artillery Armes."

"An honor, Senor Armes. You're very wise. My beds are of the softest down, and thanks to *amigo* Gabriel Ferrer, the best hunter in the province"—he pointed to the man in the skunkskin cap "—we have a stew of venison and squirrel." He noisily smacked his thick, red lips. "You'll not regret your stay here, senor. In addition to this delectable stew, which I cooked myself, you'll find I serve naught but the finest wine."

"And while you boast of your wares, Senor Jimenez," Artillery interrupted, "your guests and I grow dry. I would deem it an honor if all of them, as well as yourself, would drink with me."

"The Virgin has sent you, *amigo,*" said the grazier. "I'm Domingo Arredondo. Listening to the endless stream which gushes from that ball of fat has always made me dry. What say you, Bernardo?" He turned to the man in the workman's smock.

"There's never been a member of the Norguera family who has not been dry, senor. That's why I wade the swamps all day, working for less than the slaves beneath me, to find good timber for Senor Gundy, whose sawmill you passed some leagues away. I'll drink with you gladly, *amigo,* though you'll find that what Juan

calls the best of wine has the flavor of persimmons when picked too soon."

"Ah, but his beds, *amigo,*" said Gabriel Ferrer, the hunter. "They are stuffed with the goosedown he's robbed me of for many years. Such soft down, senor, with all the lice left on. And the chinches, senor—they have necks like the snapping *tortugas.* Let them know an American has arrived in the province, and they'll travel a mile to strip him of his skin."

"*Ya, bastardos!*" Juan Jimenez waddled up to the fire, bearing his wine-filled tray. "Heed them not, *Excelencia.* All three were suckled by *putas,* and there has never been a *real* among the three to pay for lodging at any decent inn." He served the wine, and a hand-pegged chair groaned beneath him as he sat down.

"*A su salud!*" Artillery raised his glass to the four, took a swallow, then removed his riding-hat and greatcoat and hung them on a peg stuck in the wall. When he returned to the fire and sat down, the innkeeper's embedded eyes flickered over the golden inlaid haft of the tomahawk, which showed beneath Artillery's jacket. Artillery pulled his blue coat down. Jimenez shifted his glance quickly and brought it to rest on Artillery's yellow hair.

"May Our Lady of Guadaloupe watch over your journey for wishing me health, *amigo.*" Gabriel Ferrer drained his wine and hitched his skunk cap back another inch. "I've been ridden with bilious remittent fever for over a year. Perhaps you know of a cure in Georgia that we in the province have not heard of here?"

"I am not from Georgia," Artillery told him. "But I've heard it said that the fever responds to a dose of bark and wine, and that some use the lancet freely. Have you been physicked?"

"Has he been physicked, senor!" Domingo Arredondo laughed and cleaned his black mustache of wine. "He spent a month in the Royal Hospital of Our Lady of Guadaloupe in St. Augustine last year. Once he was out, he'd not listen to Dr. Fitzpatrick, who advised him to stick to spirits of nitre. Now he takes castor oil, calomel, blue mass, rhubarb, sulphur, turpentine, and paregoric. I've given him a sheaf of herbs that I used to purge my cattle, and he drinks it in a tea. His thinness isn't from fever, senor; it's from running back and forth 'twixt house and outhouse."

"*Por Dios,* cow-lover!" Gabriel sprang suddenly to his feet and pulled his skunk cap down firmly over his forehead. "Your blabbing has started my bowels boiling within me." He was gone through a door at the back of the room before anyone could speak.

Bernardo said, "Bring us more wine, Juan. He'll need refilling

when he returns." He got up and walked to the window and stared outside, exclaiming, "*Caramba,* Juan! His buttocks are grooved to fit that bar you provide for your guests out there in the woods. It's a miracle to see a man with doeskins dragging about his knees who can run with the speed of a spotted deer."

"Jest about my bar, if you wish," said Jimenez. "It has never broken, and is smooth and free of splinters. I like not privies that are shut in. They are neither healthful nor safe. Here, one may watch for danger without peering constantly through a diamond loophole in a door, only to be attacked from behind. Do I not provide commodes for my guests to be used at night and when the weather turns to rain?" He turned to Artillery. "Perhaps, *Excelencia,* you've encountered better arrangements where you come from?"

"I've seen a place where a bathtub rested under every bed, and where the main house was built with a privy set far back, with a door directly onto the lower floor."

Jimenez slapped a hand against his thigh. "Such houses cost much money, *Excelencia,* and there are but few in the province, scarce one in St. Augustine, as you'll see. *Por Dios,* I'm right! You ride from Fort George, which you saved singlehanded from being burned and looted by moccasin boys last October."

"I did nothing, senor!" Artillery protested hotly. "I made a foolish foray, that was all, and would have been killed, except that Doctor Buckhart died for me."

"'Tis not the story traveling the woods, Senor Armes," Bernardo broke in. "Neither is it the tale which has reached Gundy's sawmill."

"Nor the one that I have heard," said Domingo Arredondo. "I have heard that the dead were piled like cordwood around you before Doctor Buckhart was slain." He smiled. "Of course, the story grows in size, senor, with every grazier who repeats it to me."

"It is the way of the province," said Jimenez. "Nevertheless, *hombres,* Doctor Buckhart and Dan McKetch were friends of mine. I believe enough of what I have heard so that the next wine drunk will be bought by me."

"And high time, Juan." Gabriel Ferrer came back in, looking more emaciated than ever. "It turns cold again. Dish us out stew, Juan, and I'll be gone to my camp before darkness captures me."

Artillery went out to see to Black Cloud's stabling and feeding, and returned with his saddlebags to find the others seated. He joined them at the long board table while Jimenez poured liberally of

the wine. The stew meat was tender and the gravy flavored hot with tiny red and green peppers. Artillery gave it a word of praise.

"Thank me, senor," said Gabriel, interrupting his guzzling. "I shoot but the fattest game for the market, for years have given me the hunter's eye. It is well to eat while you may, for the pittance paid me by such as Juan and the markets of St. Augustine scarce provides me with tobacco, powder, and ball."

"Then why not take your deer elsewhere, boaster?" said Juan over Gabriel's shoulder. "Well I know that nowhere else in the province can you sell four pounds of venison for half a *real.*"

"He has you there, *amigo.*" Domingo laughed. "Or you might collect your deer in herds, as I do my cattle, and drive them up to Georgia, where the planters are wealthy. There you might get as high as two American cents for the pound." He turned to Artillery. "I do not wish to pry, senor, but if this is your first trip to St. Augustine, I might be able to advise you should you wish to make purchases there."

"Your advice may be of value," Artillery said. "I had a little money left me, and I had thought of putting it into cattle, if I could find some stock in St. Augustine."

"May Our Lady protect you!" Domingo hastily drained his glass of wine. "If it's blooded stock you're thinking of, you'll find little in the province, and less in St. Augustine. You'll do better to ride north, senor, and make your wants known along the border of the St. Marys River, where fifty head can be stolen for you overnight. Of course, it will pay you to have friends along and see that your pistols are primed and ready, lest the next night the same herd be stolen back from you. Then you'd best be careful of blooded stock. They'll survive in Georgia when penned and fed. Turned loose to graze in the province here, they're sure to die."

"Then what are yours?" Artillery asked him.

"Mine, senor? I own no cattle of my own, nor would I. The hundred and fifty cows I graze are part of a herd belonging to Senor Kingsley of Laurel Grove, across the St. Johns River. He pays me a little for my time, and a percentage of what he makes on his cattle each year, which is little enough. If you must buy cattle, get those descended from the old Spanish stock. They look bad and are of little value for either beef or milk. In addition, you'll find them ridiculously small. But one can survive on ten acres of pasturage and knows how to live in swamps and prairies when 'tis dry, and what to do when she meets a snake." He shrugged. "Then when you have finished, you have nothing. The largest on the hoof

will be five hundred pounds, and will bring, dressed, in the markets in St. Augustine or Fernandina less than half a *real* a pound, or if taken to Georgia, perhaps six cents American."

"At least," put in Bernardo, "you pay no taxes on the lands where you fatten your cattle. Senor Gundy can cut timber only on lands which he has had to buy."

"But Senor Gundy and Senor McIntosh make money from their lumber operations, *hombres.*" Juan Jimenez took a place on the bench beside Artillery. "Here for my humble inn alone, I am taxed beyond endurance."

"Beyond endurance, say you!" Bernardo cut in ruefully. "Listen then to the lumber business, and perhaps you will wish to sell your inn and take to logging. It can be done on a smallish scale with but fifty slaves, which cost today but seven hundred American dollars a head on the market, and you'll need but twenty good log-carts, together with saws and axes, and smiths, and horses, and of oxen but twenty span. Then your slaves must not be put to work which harms them. Wading the swamp all day, which ruins the feet in less than a year and strikes one down with the direating disease and the intermittent fever, is left for free men such as me. When I ask for more than the hundred and twenty pesos a year which are paid me, I am told I cannot get it because the taxes on land and the freight on the ocean are so high that the price of boards delivered to New York and Boston is nothing."

"*Si,*" said Juan. "You speak with truth, Bernardo. Here, without gold in one's pockets, one cannot decently die. There is not even a consecrated piece of ground where a body may rest in St. Augustine. The holy fathers will keep you in the church when you're dead if your niche is paid for. Let the payments lapse"—he crossed himself swiftly—"and they throw your body out, to lie and rot just anywhere."

"It is said, Domingo, that Senor Zephaniah Kingsley is the wealthiest man in Florida," Artillery said puzzled. "If he makes nothing on his cattle and his logging, how can that be?"

Domingo Arredondo laid a finger beside his nose and grimaced slyly. "There's a trade in two-footed cattle, senor. They have a hundred times the value of those with four. The bulls are black as well as the cows, and they work while they breed."

Gabriel Ferrer got up and shouldered his beautiful rifle. "I'll be gone, *amigos.*" He turned at the door, his face looking thinner as he gave a grin. "You'll have a chance to see some of those two-footed cattle sold on the auction block, Senor Armes, a week from

now in St. Augustine. *Adios.*" He went out, closing the door behind him.

"The auction block?" Bernardo turned to Juan Jimenez. "The man's poor brains are eaten out with the fever. Slaves are sold from ships lying off the bar, but it's been years since a black was auctioned in St. Augustine."

"Yet he speaks the truth," said Juan Jimenez smugly. "The dragoons retook five of the slaves which were raided from Fort George plantation, Senor Armes. Word was sent out three weeks ago, announcing their sale at public auction as property of the Spanish crown." Jimenez's eyes disappeared farther into their pockets of fat. "It wouldn't be possible, would it, senor, that the reason for your trip to St. Augustine was to bid them in?"

"That's outrageous!" Artillery moistened his throat with a gulp of wine. "Those slaves are the property of John Houston McIntosh, Senor Jimenez. Why aren't they returned to him? How can they be sold by the Spanish crown?"

"*Quien sabe?*" Jimenez rolled his fat shoulders in a shrug. "I hear many rumors, *Excelencia,* from travelers who stop at my humble inn. Putting them together, it seems that these slaves once were the property of Colonel John McIntosh when he lived at Bellevue, not far from the Cowford. After he was released from Morro Castle, he, together with his kinsmen, destroyed Fort San Nicholas, which had to be rebuilt, and sank six Spanish galleons which were anchored in the river. His Catholic Majesty declared that all of Colonel McIntosh's personal property was forfeit to the crown."

"Who are these slaves?"

"*Cáspita, senor!* A slave is a slave." Jimenez took a mouthful of wine, sloshed it through his teeth, and swallowed. "Four bucks and a wench. There's talk that the wench when sold may bring more gold than all of the bucks put together."

"Why?" asked Artillery.

"Who knows what brings a high price in wenches, senor? This, perhaps—" Juan placed his two heavy hands beneath his own fat breasts and pushed them upwards, then slapped his overstuffed rear. "Or perhaps she cooks well. None I've spoken to has seen her, but word's about that her hair's almost straight, and her color of the lightest brown."

"If I had the gold to bid against the blades of St. Augustine," said Bernardo, "I'd like such a one to travel the swamps with."

"She'd make your intermittent fever worse," Domingo told him.

It was growing dark, and Domingo and Bernardo departed after accepting with graciousness Artillery's insistence that he be allowed to pay for their food and wine.

Artillery threw on another log and moved his chair up closer to the fire while Jimenez cleared dishes away. The fat log popped, shooting flaming sparks up the chimney, and he thought of Dauna. She built the same kind of fires inside of him, fires that crackled and sparked and snapped, and filled his veins with blood that ran as hot as the scalding, seething sap of the pine. There could be no God if such a creature must lie in chains in the filth of a slaver's warehouse, if such a body could be patted and pawed by the unclean hands of any man who had money with which to buy.

Juan Jimenez pulled a chair up beside him and sat down. "You're generous, senor."

"Because I buy food and wine for men who toil and who have less than I?"

"There are some in the province who have more," said Jimenez, "and whose alms to the poor could be poured in the eye of a green-headed fly. It is difficult to exist at all today, senor. I am loyal, but loyalty does not save one from the greediness of the Spanish crown."

"I judged that from what I heard at supper." Artillery was staring into the fire, his mind far away.

"I would deem it an honor," said Jimenez, "if you would drink with me."

"*Gracias,*" said Artillery.

The proprietor left, and came back with a bottle of inferior Spanish brandy. He poured, his small eyes watching. "To the crown!"

Artillery drank. Like Dan, he would drink to anything, for he felt that no country owned him and neither could he claim one for his own. Back of his toast were trees and rivers and swamps and prairies, and the heat and the cold in which men work, and food and wine in bellies, and love between men and women. Amy's words in the stateroom on the night she had sailed still lingered with him. Those things were the king and the flag he drank to when he drank his toast to the crown.

"You're loyal, too," said Jimenez.

"I trust you would not think otherwise," Artillery said as he set his glass down.

Outside, a breeze sprang up. It forced itself through cracks in the drafty room. Smoke leaned out from the fireplace. The inn grew sharp with the smell of the drying vegetables and peppers.

The night grew full of whispers, rustling with the movements of pines and palms.

Jimenez said, "It blows from the south. Tomorrow it will be warm. One does well to have those who leave one money, senor, and the Virgin never blessed me with such. If I had gold, I would put it neither into cattle, nor timber, nor cotton, nor tobacco, though tobacco might be the best."

"I hate tobacco," said Artillery. "It requires a man to perform the labor of oxen."

"*Si*, senor, true," Jimenez agreed. "Nor would I put it into an inn, nor a shop in St. Augustine, where everyone, including the military, is poor." His fat lips moved, and he spat into the fire. "A scurvy plague of a town! By Our Lady, it's cheap enough, for board and lodging may be had there each month for less than a doubloon. The rub is, senor, to earn the doubloon."

"Your talk leads nowhere, Senor Jimenez. If you had money, what would you put it in?"

"Silk, senor." Jimenez poured more brandy.

"Silk?"

"*Si*, senor, but not in the cloth that wraps the bodies of beautiful women. I would set myself some mulberry trees, which flourish well in the northern part of the province. From those trees I would raise and feed the worm."

The rattle of a gig could be heard on the King's Road. Jimenez stopped and listened, then sighed heavily as the sound died away in the direction of St. Augustine. "One thing I would not do, senor," he continued, "is travel through the province carrying a fortune."

"Have I said I have a fortune?"

Jimenez gave a covetous glance at the saddlebags on the floor. "The weight of your bags betrays it, senor. I noticed it as you carried them in. I am old and slow and could do little to protect you. Twice during the past two years, senor, bandits have descended on my humble inn. The men who were here are honest, but careless fellows with the loosest of mouths."

Artillery finished his brandy and stood up. "Your caution does you credit, Senor Jimenez, and I know you speak the truth. Only a short time ago, in Fernandina, an attempt was made to rob me. I dislike killing, and would hate to have the same thing happen here tonight at your humble inn."

"Killing, senor?" In spite of the fat, Juan Jimenez's eyes grew round. "You mean you were forced to kill?"

"Five men," Artillery told him seriously. "Two who waited on watch outside, and three who had broken in. I sleep like a cat, senor, with my rifle always beside me and a pistol clutched in each hand. A board creaked, and almost without awakening, I shot by the dimness of starlight shining through my window. Two went down from the pistols, and a third from my rifle. The other two I killed with knife and tomahawk when, hearing the firing, they rushed in. Like this, senor—"

He jerked the tomahawk from his waist and sent it hurtling across the room where it cleanly severed the tail from a drying coonskin. Artillery strode across and retrieved it. "If you'll show me where I'll sleep, Senor Jimenez, I'll go there. *Buenos noches!*"

"*Buenos noches,*" said Jimenez heavily. "*Por Dios,* I feel much safer, senor, and may Our Lady guard your dreams. I feel sure tonight that no bandits will break in."

6

ON SEPTEMBER 8, 1565, Don Pedro Menendez de Avilés took possession of a small peninsula on the east coast of Florida, and named it St. Augustine, because he had first sighted Florida on August 28, which the Spanish called St. Augustine's Day. The years proved well that he had picked the site with a skillful admiral's eye. On the west, the sluggish San Sebastian River provided a natural barrier against attack from the mainland. On the south and the east, a broad salt-water lagoon, known as the Matanzas River, together with Anastasia Island, a strip of land some three miles wide and fourteen long, provided ample protection from unexpected attack by sea.

The Spanish military headquarters of North America were set up in the town. For forty years the Spanish governors built forts along the Atlantic coast as far north as Virginia and resisted every effort of other nations to establish any colonies. Although twenty-one years after St. Augustine was founded Sir Francis Drake burned and sacked the town, the Spanish colonists who had fled to the forests promptly returned and rebuilt their headquarters.

When the English settled in Charleston in 1670, the nearness of this rival British colony filled the canny Spanish with alarm. It was decided that something more impregnable than the wooden

forts, which had defended the town for over a hundred years, was needed to cover the northern approach both by land and sea.

Following the designs of Vauban, a great French military engineer, the Spanish began construction of a quadrangular, four-bastioned, moated stronghold of *coquina,* an everlasting substance of sand and shell which could be quarried on nearby Anastasia Island. The outer walls were twelve feet thick at the base and tapered to seven feet at the top. Indian hostages, soldiers, Negro slaves, and inhabitants of the town labored on the walls alone for fifteen years, but that was only the beginning. The interior, designed to garrison a thousand fighting men, and the cells, dungeons, powder magazines, and storerooms were not completed until 1756, some seventy years more.

Jutting westward from the Castillo de San Marcos as far as the San Sebastian River, a wall and moat were built. At the city gates, a single drawbridge, approached by the old King's Road, provided the only entrance into the town.

Artillery had left Juan Jimenez's inn at break of day. La Posada Media was so situated that a traveler making an early start could, without pushing his horse to exhaustion, reach St. Augustine before the drawbridge was raised at sundown. By leaving very early, Artillery had mapped out a leisurely journey and broken it by stopping at a settler's cabin for food at noon.

The cabin was built of hand-hewn logs and had a kitchen attached by a breezeway. It was neat inside, although sparsely furnished. A dark-eyed Spanish girl served him pork, corn bread, and goat's milk in silence while his swarthy host chatted about the perversity of pigs and the hazards of raising two acres of cotton and tobacco.

The day was much warmer, as Juan had predicted the night before, and a chubby baby girl, clad in a wisp of a shirt, crawled about Artillery's feet while he ate, and gurgled up at him from under the table. The Spaniard might have nothing, but the air of permanency and contentment surrounding the cabin was strong.

Artillery's loneliness possessed him again after he had pushed on. Men fought to be free, but what they really wanted was to be free of freedom. Lack of ties was an irksome thing. Ideals could never take the place of a woman to struggle and work for, or of a baby to feed and shelter. Gold might buy a Fort George plantation, but it was Mistress Eliza and the child away at school in Georgia that made it a home.

Unconsciously, he hastened Black Cloud's pace. The King's Road stretched out ahead through the pines, deserted and soundless in the afternoon's haze. Looking down it, the vista was very long. The pines thinned, and an orange grove, thick enough to mask the house of its owner, made a bronze contrast in a clearing. Beyond the grove, a single wolf crossed the road like a scudding yellowish cloud and vanished into the forest.

Artillery fell to dreaming. The road dipped into the edge of a swamp where trees grew thicker as Black Cloud moved. Half-hidden in a tangle at his right, he saw a single Indian, standing impassive and watching unblinkingly, his mahogany body almost indistinguishable against the matted background. The road through the thicket became narrower, impenetrable on either side and scarce wide enough for a wagon to turn around. Underfoot, black thick mud was kept damp by a hundred ribbonlike streams that trickled constantly across the trail. The footing was made more treacherous by a corduroy flooring of saplings which some settler had laid to keep his wagon from bogging.

The interminable stretch grew darker and used up most of the afternoon. By the time he saw an arch ahead and forded a stream to ride free of the encumbering morass, he was surprised to find that the sun was still two hours from going down.

The country had changed. Stunted bushes spread out before his eyes to join with ruffled waist-high grass. Some distance to his left an arm of water reached fingers inland.

The road bore toward it, and ahead he saw the ancient walls of an old square fort. As the road brought him nearer, it was obvious that one of the walls of the fort was crumbling and the others in need of repair. He rode past and saw a black gazing down at him from a single tower. Three others, holding muskets, but barefoot and clad in disreputable homespuns, grinned as he passed and waved to him from their perch atop the western wall. He had heard of old Fort Moosa, manned entirely by Negro slaves who had fled from Georgia and who were protected by Spain.

St. Augustine was less than two miles away.

The road ran into water, and he forded another stream. A clump of trees cut off his view. Past them, he halted and drew in his breath. Fresh salt air struck at him full. To his left lay the sea, and squatting between him and its glistening surface, its four uprising watchtowers looking everywhere, was the yellowish, grim Castillo de San Marcos. For a while he stared, wondering if Dan

had been in its fungus-grown dungeons below the level of the forty-foot moat, lighted now into fire by the lowering sun.

He turned and rode on. More trees swallowed him. Once through them, he was facing the gates of St. Augustine.

From two tall, square pylons of *coquina* blocks which flanked the road, heavy chains ran down to support the lowered drawbridge. The pylons were topped with graceful concave peaks capped with representations of the Moorish pomegranate. In contrast to the weather-stained masonry of the city walls, the pylons and drawbridge, erected just the year before, looked glitteringly new.

The sentry halted him as he crossed the drawbridge, and two more came from a guardhouse at the left. Artillery explained his business and gave them his passport.

While the men were reading, he had his first view of the Calle de las Puertas, where the rutted road ran straight ahead through the narrow main street of the somnolent town. Many of the houses had first-floor bases of tabby or *coquina,* with wooden structures added above to make a second floor. Porches jutted out to overhang the street and seemingly stick to the houses without support, as a bird-cage might be, nailed to the side. Orange trees grew inside the gates, some high enough to be seen above the wall.

The shingled roof of the guardhouse was white with birds. One of the sentries went inside to summon the officer of the guard. As he closed the door behind him, the birds rose up, circled and settled again, each one emitting its own particular brand of raucous call.

The officer came out, his uniform as resplendent as Reduro's and similar, except that the facings and cording, instead of being purple, were dark olive-green. He was not much older than Artillery, and when he ran his hand admiringly down the length of Black Cloud's neck, his olive face lighted for an instant with the expression of a covetous boy.

"You are Senor Artillery Armes?" He stumbled over the pronunciation as he consulted the passport given him by the sentry.

"*Si,* Senor Under-Lieutenant."

"You were born in the province?"

"*Si,* senor. North of the St. Johns River."

"Your parents are Spanish?"

"I cannot say, Senor Under-Lieutenant. They were attacked by Creeks, and both died on the night I was born."

"*Que lástima!* My sympathy, senor. And what church were you confirmed in?"

"I came here to trade, not to worship, Senor Under-Lieutenant. I carry a passport from His Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain."

The young officer clicked his heels. "Your compliments shall be delivered to His Excellency, Governor Enrique White, Senor Armes," he said with all the weighty formality of official Spain. He snapped an order to one of the sentries, and handed him the passport. The soldier saluted and walked off briskly up the narrow street. "If His Excellency desires to see you, you will be escorted to him. I have no authority, senor, to tell you you will be admitted, or whether or not you may remain. Meanwhile—" He gave a slight bow, and gestured toward the guardhouse. "I have some wine that is better than most which is shipped in here from Spain."

"*Gracias,* Senor Under-Lieutenant."

Artillery dismounted, and one of the sentries stepped to Black Cloud's bridle. The officer led the way into a plainly-plastered room, where heavy bars guarded the window. They went through another door to more comfortable quarters beyond. He reached for a rope and pulled a flight of swinging stairs down from the ceiling. The stairs led up into a bedroom.

Upstairs, the officer found a decanter and glasses and took Artillery out onto a porch which faced eastward to the sea. To their left, the guns and walls of the Castillo frowned over the town. Below the porch was a formal walled-in garden, bright with bignonia, bougainvillea, and coral vines. A drive, much wider than the Calle de las Puertas stretched southward from the Castillo along the bank of the Matanzas River. It followed the course of a sea wall, which formed a huge ships' basin, rectangular in form, its opening facing toward the river.

The sea wall was dotted with the bright clothes of strolling couples, the men's top hats, more sober clothes, and white stockings broken by an occasional flash of polished knee-boots, glittering morion, and white jacket and breeches of a uniform.

Several gigs moved along in unhurried procession, their occupants pulling up occasionally to exchange a greeting with some couple walking on the wall. Across the Matanzas, the long, flat streak of Anastasia Island extended southward, its shoreside brightened by the setting sun. Near its northernmost point, which marked the inlet directly opposite from the Castillo, a scaffold-like watchtower thrust itself up high above the surrounding trees.

Artillery and the lieutenant were scarcely seated and tasting

their wine when a puff of smoke showed at the top of the watch-tower. A second later, Artillery heard the boom of a heavy gun. Shortly after, the report was followed by another. He jumped to his feet, but the lieutenant was before him.

"A ship—and high time, too!" The officer ducked inside the bedroom to secure a spyglass. "Here 'tis February and only four so far this year—and none from Havana from where our pay is due." He fitted the glass to his eye, adjusted it, and went on talking. Down on the drive, people were running to stand along the sea wall.

"The guns are to let the pilots know," the officer continued. "They live in the pilot block, in those houses there." He pointed to a group of small wooden houses, set close to the fort. "You'll see one put out in a minute to guide her in through the inlet. They're appointed by the King, lucky devils. Their jobs are the best in the town."

A soldier appeared on the battlements of the Castillo, and for no apparent reason began to roll a drum. As if in answer, a man darted out of one of the houses in the pilot block and headed for the waterfront on the run. A moment later, Artillery saw him put out from shore in a longboat rowed by four huge blacks who sent it skimming seaward.

"What think you, senor?" The officer passed the spyglass to Artillery. "She's coming around the point yonder now. Do you make her to be American or Spanish?"

Artillery put the glass to his eye. A fore-and-aft-rigged vessel sprang into view. "She's carrying a square fore-topsail and t'gallant."

"That'll make her an American coaster, the devil take it!" The young officer's voice was angry. "She'll be bringing supplies from Savannah or Charleston for Forbes and Company. Give us another month, senor, without gold from Havana, and the army will be eating dead fish from the river, and drinking sour orange juice instead of wine."

Artillery was silent, watching the schooner as she put about with her canvas flapping to wait for the pilot's longboat. She looked a lot like the *Blue Dolphin,* but his knowledge of ships was from Doctor Zeke's books. He would have to wait until she was much nearer to be sure.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, and a sentry showed in the door. "His Excellency, the Governor, will see Senor Armes."

The lieutenant said, "Have an escort ready. We'll be right down."

The drummer on the battlement stopped his beating. "Now

we'll have quiet until we get downstairs," said the officer wearily. "Come, senor. At sunup and sundown, and at full high noon, with every arrival and every sailing and at every sale or piece of news that comes to town, those drummers roll their drums. I tell you, senor, my aching head is sore."

The longboat was drawing near the ship. Within an hour, she would be across the Matanzas River and eased into the sea wall basin.

A squad of eight soldiers was drawn up in double ranks in the street outside. They presented arms with a rattle and a slap when Artillery and the officer came out of the guardroom. Another man led Black Cloud from around the house, and Artillery mounted. The young officer became rigidly formal. At an order, the soldier dropped Black Cloud's bridle, and disappeared into the guardhouse. When he came out again, Artillery shuddered. The man was carrying a drum.

Three small Negro children, barelegged and in the most nondescript of homespuns, had gathered to watch. As Artillery waited, the audience was augmented by four more. They stood in silence, staring with shining eyes at Black Cloud and her rider.

The drum gave a whirr. The eight soldiers moved with precision, arranging themselves on each side of Black Cloud in ranks of four. The lieutenant and the drummer fell in at the head to form a hollow square, filled at the back by the Negro children, who immediately took posts in the rear. The drummer gave his sticks a flourish, and the procession moved off, following the rhythmical rataplan of the drum.

Heads appeared over the balcony railings. Black Cloud, conscious of some unusual occasion, became skittish at first, and then, at her rider's tightened rein, began to step proud and high. Artillery dared a single look behind him, then turned his face resolutely forward and set his chin. The procession was lengthened by half a dozen more Negro children and three ragged Indians, who had attached themselves to the tail of the kite. He became very thankful that most of St. Augustine had been lured to the waterfront to watch the ship come in.

Artillery took note of La Candiotera that McIntosh had mentioned. Faces appeared at the two windows to watch the parade, and four or five people crowded themselves into the open door of the inn. He began to think that John Houston McIntosh might have been jesting when he mentioned caution. It was difficult to be conspiratorial when drumbeats and a detachment as large as a firing

squad welcomed you into the town. Maybe they really were going to shoot him.

He had a quick, unpleasant sensation of riding in a tumbril, and stole another furtive look behind. It did little to reassure him, for several whites had been added, including a couple of women with tightly curled hair set high on their heads and surmounted by waving plumes. In addition, a workman carrying a spade was plodding along behind the women. He was old and bent, and marched with the fixed, determined expression of a gravedigger looking for business.

The women wore flamboyant low-neck dresses of jaconet muslin, which proclaimed them on the lighter side. Their long-sleeved pelisses of startling silk were heavy with frills, and hung open in front to reveal their dresses. They caught Artillery's eye, and smiled and waved. He turned away hastily. They had lifted their trailing dresses in front to a point well above their ankles, something which he knew no lady would do.

Up ahead, from one of the porchlike balconies, an excited Spanish voice screamed, *"Tate! Cuidado!* Look out! Take care!"

Out of a side street, no wider than Artillery was tall, burst a milk-white mare. Just before it crashed headlong into a house which faced the alley, it reared, its front feet pawing the air, and swung to face the oncoming procession in a neat half turn.

Riding the mare was a girl, clad in fashionable riding habit of dark blue. Above the black velvet collar of a snug, gilt-buttoned jacket, a white stock circled her slender throat. Her gloves were tan, her small, shining half-boots of black Spanish leather. A riding crop swung from her hand. A military cap of beaver, with plume and feathers in front and a band of gold braid around the crown, was perched at a rakish angle on top of her bronze-gold hair.

The mare's white ears went up with a snap at the sight of the soldiers and the whirring sound of the rolling drum. The girl's gloved hand tightened hard on the rein and her deep blue eyes grew round with excitement, not unmixed with a touch of fear.

The mare took charge of matters. Her ears went down, and before anyone could move or think, she charged headlong, straight for the noisy drummer. One drumstick went flying as the soldier broke and ran. The young lieutenant ducked into a doorway. The street was filled with shrill, scared cries as the Negro children scattered.

Less than a yard from one of the frightened soldiers, the girl leaned back, reining full strength. The white mare stopped and

reared again. Artillery leaped from his saddle and caught at her bridle as her feet came down.

The young lieutenant left his doorway and bustled up. "*Caramba,* senorita! You've been warned about such riding before. This is not New York. The streets of St. Augustine are narrow. Next time this happens, you'll be summoned before His Grace, the Lord Ordinary Mayor."

The girl's blue eyes grew stormy. "And what about you blocking the streets with your drums and soldiers, Lieutenant Sanchez? First you're shooting cannon and then you're beating *timbals!* You know that noises make Whitecap nervous."

"*Caramba, senorita!*"

"And furthermore," the girl went on, "I could have my father forbid you the house for your language. Instead of that, I'll see that word reaches Father O'Reilly that when you talk to ladies, you swear."

"Senorita—" The lieutenant looked helpless. "Is this the way to welcome visitors to St. Augustine?"

"Visitors?" She turned and looked at Artillery, and then at the assemblage which had crowded around so as not to miss a single word of the exciting affair.

"He holds the King's passport," Lieutenant Sanchez put in stiffly.

She suddenly began to laugh, and rested her gloved hand lightly on Artillery's shoulder. "You're lucky, *amigo.* My word, I thought they were going to hang you. Are you an American?"

"No, senorita." He smiled at her perfection, her figure, face and hair. "But I speak English."

She leaned a little from the saddle and said very softly, "Then let us try to talk together sometime. Perhaps we'll meet if you stay here. I prefer the English language to Spanish. Whitecap's really a beastly nag when she takes to cutting capers, and Lieutenant Sanchez is really a dear. It's late, and I must be going. *Hasta la vista.*" She raised her crop in quick salute, then, as she turned, slashed it warningly against the dancing mare.

Everyone watched as she rode away. Sanchez gently scratched his forehead and muttered, "These Americans! She's so beautiful—and some day she's going to kill someone, I fear."

The drummer retrieved his drumstick, and the procession moved on. The twilight was growing dusky. They turned at a tree-covered plaza and stopped before a *coquina* mansion, marked by a high-walled garden. Sanchez led the way inside through a church-

like room full of massive carved furniture. Down a hall, they passed a tiny chapel where candles gleamed beside a *prie-dieu.* At the end of the hall a double oak door stood open. It was gloomy inside, and the figure of a man stood silhouetted against a mullioned window. He was dressed in the blackest of satin, but even before he turned, Artillery knew it was Don Jose de Reduro.

He waited a while before condescending to swing around and wave the lieutenant into the hall with his slender hand. When Sanchez had gone, Don Jose crossed the room and closed the door.

"I called you hasty, senor, the first time I met you," he said with a bow. "I find you still consistent. It is worse than hasty to steal a passport and thrust your neck in the mouth of Spain in the role of American spy. Unfortunately, His Excellency, the Governor, is indisposed with a fever." His fine teeth showed, looking doubly white in the gloomy room. "My apologies for the governor, senor, but who can be more overjoyed to welcome you than I?"

7

ARTILLERY TOOK his time before replying. He was glad of McIntosh's warning to be discreet, for in a second more his temper would have betrayed him. His mind had been on death, not subtlety. For the first time, he really understood Doctor Zeke's admonition, "Thou shalt not kill." It did no good to eliminate a human life. Should he reach for his knife or tomahawk, following his first wild flash of instinct, Reduro would be dead and silenced, but Spain, which had produced Reduro, would still sit enthroned in majesty in the gloomy room.

He looked at the crimson hangings, dark against the windows, the massive carved oak of the long, heavy table, the high-backed chairs, sombre with blood-red velvet edged in gold—sumptuousness truly fit for a Spanish governor, or even a Spanish king.

"Spain's not sleeping; she's dying." General Bowles' words came back to him. He found himself touched with some of the general's rare insight. A man could be killed, but not a nation. A nation died under the weight of corroding fungus. Artillery had already seen the growth throughout the province—the weakness of ten loyal soldiers assigned, unhelped, to hold the port of Fernandina; the murder of Firkin; the creeping fear that had caused the imprisonment of Colonel McIntosh in 1794; the seizure of

Dan's plantation; the closing in of America with the Louisiana Purchase.

Spain in her dotage: fostering the hatred of the McIntoshes, who were wealthy and strong—*touch me not but with a glove;* forgetting the loyal dragoons who held her outposts—*we'll be drinking sour orange juice for wine;* taxing her settlers beyond endurance—*Here from my humble inn alone—;* blind to everything; wrapped up entirely in the pageantry and glory of the Church and State at home; forgetting entirely, as England had forgotten, that humble priests and humble men who loved unseen across an ocean were still a part of the nation; closing her fevered eyes to the fact that the Indians and the blacks were human beings; demanding loyalty from them, and giving none in return.

Don Jose was only a poisonous growth, sprung full bloom from fields too well manured, fattening on the corruption which surrounded him. Such growths took strength from their inner poison. They would die out only when waste was laid to the lands which produced them.

No more than the death of Bowles had been felt by England would the death of Don Jose de Reduro be felt by Spain. His kind would die with his country, as the cruelest of the Caesars had died with Rome, never to be felt by the world again. Right now he was imminent and menacing, adding his aura to the hothouse quality of the room.

"You proved voluble when we talked before." Reduro hung a leg across a corner of the table, displaying an elegant buckle at his knee. "Is my presence disconcerting?"

"Quite," said Artillery. He went uninvited and seated himself in a high-backed velvet chair. "I had intended to kill you when I saw you. The process of rejecting an idea so close to my heart, senor, silenced me with a momentary twinge of pain."

"*Por Dios!*" Reduro laughed. "There's an air about you, Senor Armes, which charms me like a coral snake. It might possibly be your excellent dress or your fluent Castilian, which is music to my ear. Then, there's something Indian about you. I think it's that hatchet you carry around. It's scarcely the weapon of a gentleman with golden hair."

He left the table, lit a taper from a tinderbox, and ignited half a dozen candles. As he returned, he stopped and held the candelabra close, looking down at Artillery. He put the candelabra on the table, perched up beside it, and started swinging his black-silk-stockinged legs.

"I dislike to criticize, but for a beau, there's something outdated about that jacket you wear. It's an emblem of an era past, and I scarcely thought to see its like in the province again. It has a touch of the mummer about it, senor, like the late General Bowles, who starved himself to death on a diet of lime juice in the dungeons of Morro. A rollicking fellow!" Don Jose crossed himself piously. "May the saints rest his soul. Have you really changed your mind about killing me?"

"For the moment, senor, but I might be persuaded to change it again. Your interminable insults could force me into boxing your ears. I feel sure, unless you're lacking in honor entirely—a belief from which I'm trying hard to free my mind—that the nephew of Manuel Marco Jesus Roberto de Reduro of Valencia, and a *capitan* in the First Havana Regiment of His Catholic Majesty, would surely not sidestep the *code duello,* as you have sidestepped so many things before."

"Capital, capital, senor!" Reduro stroked his thin-line beard, and began to beam. "Your memory is such that one might be forced to believe you educated, were your rashness and ignorance not so well known. The loutish Americans who have overcrowded us in St. Augustine until a decent house cannot be had for any price, far from remembering my army rank and my royal relations, can scarce retain the name which is my own."

"Perhaps my memory is that of the Indians, to which you have taken such pains to compare me, senor. I have an eye for animals, the color and build of a horse, still or in motion, more particularly when its marking is as noticeable as a dapple gray. Other animals impress me, too—the stench of skunks, who live by robbing the nests of peaceful settlers; the howl of wolves, who attack in the darkness in packs; and the great wild boar, which strikes suddenly from ambush, maiming and killing those we love. *Si,* senor, there is something unmistakable about the shape of a man half pig and half human, particularly when one sees him riding away in the moonlight. Dress him as you like, senor, in the finest of silk or the most brilliant of uniform; hang him with titles and royal relations, and this Indian you find in me detects without error that such a man was sired by a dog and suckled by a wallowing sow."

Reduro's face looked gray. He left the table, walked to a bell-pull on the wall, reached out his hand as though to pull it, then lowered his arm, and turned away. He made a tour of the windows, slowly unloosening the tiebacks, and stood each time in silence, watching the heavy draperies fall. Artillery sat stonily, his eyes

intent on Don Jose's shadow jumping grotesquely about the wall. When the windows were curtained, Reduro returned to the end of the table, and seated himself with delicate grace in a chair.

"You speak with the tongue of an Indian, too, Senor Armes. I am constantly misunderstanding you. The first time we met, you spoke in parables of bribery. I considered your youth and your emotion of the moment, then chose not to take exception, since I was engaged in the line of duty. Now I admit you officially to St. Augustine, acting for the governor, and what am I told? First, that you have decided to kill me. Then you speak words which, if said in the presence of witnesses, would force me to have my seconds wait upon you—unless I misunderstand you."

"You understand me all too well, Don Jose."

"A word from me, and you'll spend the night in San Marcos!" Don Jose's hand slapped down hard on the table top. "I'd advise you to make yourself clearer, and have a care. You're under suspicion here, at best, with a passport that's none too authentic."

"My possession of it is now well known to quite a number of people," Artillery reminded him mildly. "I feel sure His Excellency, Governor White, will be interested in the details when he recovers from his illness. After I'm imprisoned in the Castillo tonight, what will you do with the passport, Senor Reduro—eat it or throw it away?"

"I dislike your impertinence, Senor Armes. I have no wish to imprison you. Neither do I intend to duel with you, nor with any man who has the province buzzing with his ability to kill. My advice to you is this: keep a civil tongue in your head, but drop your parables for the moment and say what you have to say."

"It's easily said," Artillery told him. "I have no fear of you, Senor Reduro, nor the dungeons of your Castillo. On the contrary, it is you who has fear of me. I think you've made that obvious."

"You insist on being obscure, Senor Armes, but pray go on. You claim that I'm afraid, and I insist that you are the one in jeopardy."

"By your presence, perhaps," Artillery answered. "I do not know by what neat device Governor White was laid low with the indisposition which put you in his place to receive me here today."

"Your imagination gallops, senor." Reduro waved his hand.

"Perhaps," Artillery admitted. "Still it hasn't the speed with which you rode on the night you shot Doctor Buckhart from ambush and fled on your dapple gray."

"Your talk becomes dangerous, senor. It is clear that you are intimating that I led, or rode with, this group of Georgia ruffians who raided Senor McIntosh's plantation. That is a serious charge to bring against an official of unblemished standing. It is still more serious when it is known throughout the province that you hate that official because he was forced to arrest a friend of yours, a notorious bandit who had violated the laws of Spain.

"The Spanish courts of justice demand proof, Senor Armes. There may be fifty men in Florida, and double that number in Georgia, whose horses might be called dapple gray." Reduro snapped his fingers. "Let me ease your mind, senor. A dozen estimable citizens can testify that on the night of that raid I was fifty miles away."

"No doubt," said Artillery. "Liars flock together like cowering quail, and one is not skillful unless he has others to back him. Unfortunately for you, Senor Reduro, your activities throughout the province have left a well-marked trail. I have heard from the lips of Senor McIntosh that to operate his plantation in peace you are the man he has to pay."

"Ah!" exclaimed Reduro. "The deer has suddenly raised its tail. We come to Senor McIntosh. A delicate subject. His family is one 'tis well to stay away from, senor." His soft voice became confidential. "Tell me—is it not John Houston McIntosh who procured you the passport signed by the King?"

"You said I stole it," Artillery reminded him. "And also that I was an American spy."

Reduro extended one of his slender swinging legs and regarded his silver shoe buckle admiringly. "I am possessed with an unfortunate sense of humor, Senor Armes. It is a buffer against the smell of fish, which permeates St. Augustine, my antipathy to wenches who powder themselves in the daytime and sweat in bed at night, and my routine duties, which I find so dry. There's something so sound and stable about you, such an air of blond purity, and such a clearness of eye, that I feel caught in an irresistible desire to shock you." He pursed his lips and caressed his beard. "Have you ever had the boot used on you, senor?"

"The boredom of your threats is the greatest torture I've ever suffered."

"I commend your courage in bearing with me." Don Jose favored Artillery with an imperturbable smile. "The boot is a neat device, senor. The leg crackles beneath its squeezing, and sometimes pieces of bone protrude. I was wondering if we used it on you if

you'd really tell us the truth about what plans are forming for the undermining of Spain in Senor McIntosh's empty brain." He looked at Artillery and shook his head. "No, it is useless, senor. You're of the stolid type who, rather than betray ideals, would suffer and die. We really should get together, senor. You kill your enemies with weapons, and I kill mine with thinking. We would make an irresistible combination."

"Rather than team with a *hijo de zorra,*" Artillery said, "it would be more pleasant to die."

"We could be so wealthy," Reduro went on, ignoring the insult. "I know all that goes on at Fort George Plantation, anyhow. I was thinking about the gold we recovered from Senor McKetch's late stronghold."

"There was no gold left there. Now I know that you lie."

"Ah, but think back, senor, and you'll see where I always speak the truth. Don Justo Lopez was promised gold by Doctor Buckhart before your threatened departure from Fernandina."

"If he was promised it, he got it."

"Assuredly—but only a tithe. It was necessary to learn the hiding-place of the balance from another idealist. Truly, senor, it's touching to see how you bandits stick together."

Artillery was suddenly on his feet, his knife held flat on his hand for throwing. "If you've tortured Dan—"

"Softly, senor," said Reduro. "There are men who do not talk under torture. One learns by experience to judge the look in their eyes. Such a one is Melchor Salazar, a stubborn Spaniard who could neither be bought nor forced to reveal his sacred secrets."

"Your sense of humor is betraying you again, Don Jose." Artillery slowly sheathed his knife, and sat again in the chair.

"Assuredly," said Reduro. "Yet he talked quite freely without our touching him or his fine son, Damien, who sings so well, accompanied by his own guitar."

"I don't believe he told you, nor Damien either."

"They did, senor." Reduro looked at his fingernails and smiled again. "First let me tell you why you should not be so hasty with your weapons. Do you value the life of Dan McKetch?"

"More than my own."

"A foolish conceit," said Reduro, "although I understand it in one so rash and young. Twice I have had the same weakness strike me while overflushed with wine. Today I have learned, as you will, senor, that no life is quite so important to me as mine. We return to the doughty Dan McKetch. He likes his food, senor—a

lusty man whom I admire. Never, like the British-loving Bowles, would he starve himself by drinking lime juice instead of filling his belly with food and wine."

Artillery was caught in spite of himself, trapped by the first real promise of news about Dan. "Is he well, Don Jose? Tell me—" He bit off his questions, but his eagerness had not gone unmarked.

"From word which has reached me, his quarters in Morro are not so dark as some, nor so damp as those beneath the sea," said Don Jose. "His Excellency, the Governor General of Cuba, is a great humanitarian. Your friend is feeding better than our soldiers here in St. Augustine—though that might not be called a fattening diet." He sighed. "Your affection is touching, senor. I would regret to hear he was moved to the Cave of the Lowering Knife."

"You're wasting your breath, Reduro. Dan McKetch has never feared the threats of Spanish cruelty." Artillery spoke bravely, but he was conscious of his own futility.

"The Lowering Knife's such a neat device," Don Jose continued dreamily. "Suspended above a prisoner who is chained to the floor, the blade is lowered steadily by action of the tide which half floods the cave. It takes four tides to kill a prisoner, senor—two highs and two lows. I have heard that when watching the heavy blade descending, the natural functions of the ocean seem unnecessarily slow.

"You keep fingering your weapons, Senor Armes, when I have nothing but kindliness toward you. I am trying to tell you in friendly fashion that the death of the tides is reserved for those involved in assassination of an official of Spain. That would be the fate of Senor McKetch if, because of his former connection with you, you should be so rash as to murder me."

"You've convinced me it will be unnecessary." Artillery's eyes were bluer than usual with a wild fanatical glitter. "Any dog with a mind such as yours digs his own pit in some special level of hell. I'm satisfied to leave to someone better qualified the religious duty of slowly dismembering you."

"*Gracias,* senor." Reduro smiled. "We understand each other well. It's a pity you weren't present to watch when we stripped the musical Damien's mother at the compound and set her astride a fence-rail. My idea came from the wooden donkey with its sharp top edge which sits unused in the Castillo today along with many other ingenious machines for extracting important information which remind one of the former strength of Spain."

He eyed Artillery speculatively. "Perhaps you can see the donkey some day, senor. It will be long remembered, by such a lover of horses, although its color is more brown than dapple gray. As it is, we are cursed with a series of kindly governors, whose integrity makes things difficult for me. An humble fence-rail had to serve, but it sufficed very well. We scarce had hung the weights on her feet before we had the information from Melchor and his talented son. The gold was neatly buried in a field, senor, beneath growing tobacco which no one would wish to destroy."

Reduro paused and sighed again. "So many things are a pity today. The additional gold I recovered had to be divided among some of my loyal dragoons, and more had to go to Don Justo and his garrison in Fernandina for back pay. Then it was such a pity that Salazar and his son were lacking in your steadfastness and spoke so quickly. The senora is still remarkably young and beautiful to have so large a boy."

Artillery felt that his head must burst with blinding rage and pain. He stood up slowly and found to his discomfort that he was trembling in every limb. "Some day, senor—" he began.

"Assuredly!" Reduro's voice broke in, hard as the rock of the ancient Castillo. "Some day, Senor Traitor, we meet again. Let us understand our position fully. You have information which I do not wish given to Enrique White. I have plans of my own—I collect my money where I can, since none comes from the royal treasury for those who hold St. Augustine. Neither you nor John Houston McIntosh is going to stand in my way—nor a thieving United States Marshal, nor Luis de Onis, our weakling of an ambassador in Washington, whom your falsified passport was bought from."

He sprang up suddenly, his lean face ugly. "Are you surprised at my information, senor? It is my business to keep myself informed of what goes on in this province. It would be easy for me to have you killed and silence you, but as you have pointed out yourself so clearly, it might prove awkward and start an embarrassing investigation, to dispose of a citizen carrying a passport from the King. As you have been told, there are plans afoot to take this province away from Spain. John Houston McIntosh is furthering them, together with others whose names I know. It suits me for the moment to take their gold as a price for my silence, as it suits me for the moment to spare your life as a price for yours."

A knock sounded on the door. Reduro dropped his voice to a whisper. "Go about your business, senor, but keep tight tongs on your ready tongue. I know you have gold. Keep it, and buy what

you wish, but always remember: that passport you hold makes you a Spanish citizen. I have spoken something of what might happen to traitors. You have been employed by McIntosh to carry messages for him and arouse the citizens of this province to rebellion. *Hasta luego, amigo.* The traitor McIntosh pays me well, but unwillingly, for holding my tongue; you he pays willingly, but not so well, for your ability to ride and kill. It is better that both of us be discreet and amiable, since both of us are in the traitor McIntosh's pay."

8

NIGHT HAD CLOSED IN, and Artillery rode slowly through the streets of St. Augustine, his disconsolate confusion marked by sunken chin. He had come to the town with spirits high, firmly sold on a burning cause, a purpose backed by Doctor Zeke and McIntosh and Quentin. Don Jose de Reduro in the space of minutes had torn down his spiring castles, undermined his firm foundations, and ripped his streaming banners to tatters.

It had seemed so easy to accept the piece of diplomatic writing which guaranteed him the beneficent mothering of fading Spain and the chance to stay and settle in the territory he loved so well. He had shied from the epithet "bandit" since he was born, always conscious of the stigma and implied nearness of a Spanish gaol. Now, without consideration, he had given a blackguard and a knave the right to call him traitor, and must in fairness accept the odious name.

Blinded by the power of the United States and Marshal Quentin's cleverness, spurred by his loneliness and his need for some national anchor, he had thought to adopt the newly-born powerful country to the north as his homeland. He had failed to see what was obvious to Don Jose, that no matter whence the passport came, once it was accepted, Artillery Armes was bound by honor to cherish and defend the land of his birth. He might move to the United States and become a citizen there, should the years prove him worthy. If he stayed in Florida and accepted money from McIntosh to overthrow the province, Reduro was right. Regardless of their methods, he and the cynical aide to Governor White were birds of a feather, both traitors to their mother country, Spain.

He circled the town, drinking in the smell of flowers, of orange and persimmon trees, savoring the breeze from the ocean, and un-

conscious of it. He had been betrayed. How had Doctor Zeke and his wisdom snared him into such a position? Could John Houston McIntosh, kindly to him as a father, be unjustly a player in such a crooked game? The world indeed must judge him stupid to pick him to be such a brainless pawn. There were people he loved who would recognize his ignorant weakness—Cheti Haiola; Hasse Micco; Celine, perhaps; and Dauna. He wondered if he could ever face them again.

Bowles had died, steadfast to England; Dan would die, steadfast in his hatred of the countries which had rebuffed and betrayed him; Doctor Zeke had died, adhering only in loyalty to Dan and the others he loved; Quentin and John Houston McIntosh cared only for the United States, and were firm in an unswerving hatred of the crown; but Artillery Armes had nothing. He was playing the game to be let alone, to love some woman unmolested, to settle down in peacefulness, like Juan Jimenez or the Spaniard with the chubby baby. Even his actions lacked justification, for he could find within him no burning hatred of Spain.

He was caught on both sides—the pesos in his pocket binding his promise to Quentin and the Scotchman, the passport in his pocket pledging his allegiance to His Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain. He wished he were back in Cheti Haiola's village, where a man paid homage only to the welfare of his fellow men.

He passed the barracks where a dozen dragoons sat on a bench watching the moon rise over Anastasia Island. He kept on toward Maria Sanchez Creek and circled back toward the square again. He was hungry, but his new indecision left him loath to visit La Candiotera. It was difficult to decide what line to take should he encounter the German widow, Ellen. Should he contact Hulbert, or should he drop John Houston McIntosh and Quentin entirely and return the money paid him which had grown in his mind to the status of Judas' thirty pieces of silver.

Life was looming up full of monstrous complications. Why wasn't it possible to lop off the past entirely as cleanly as he had cut the tail from the drying coonskin in Juan Jimenez's tavern? Perhaps he would. He could ask Hasse Micco's help. He had more than enough to purchase a hundred head of cattle and build a house near grazing lands which Hasse Micco could show him. With Dauna with him, what more could he ask?

He felt that the slave girl to be auctioned would be Dauna. Her nearness was in the air, everywhere about him, sweetening the breeze from the ocean, tingling throughout him with tiny, pleasant

prickles under his skin. He was glad he was able to hold his tongue with Reduro and not mention her. Don Jose could have no inkling that he had ever met her. Somehow he felt confident that a single word would have caused not only Dauna but the other four slaves to be whisked away and sold elsewhere than St. Augustine.

Black Cloud stumbled, and with a pang of conscience he recognized she must be very tired. He slowed her and turned her down the Calle de las Puertas toward La Candiotera. She would be rubbed down and fed there. He could think his plans out further over dinner.

When Black Cloud was stabled, he took his precious saddlebags and went into the inn. The main room was low and smoke-filled, and smelled of wine. Four large tables stood inside the door. They were covered with checkered cloths, somewhat the worse for wear. The two women who had joined the parade on Artillery's trip to the governor's mansion sat at one of the tables with a man. They were tending toward tipsiness, and the plumes, as though in sympathy, had grown droopy in their tightly-curled hair. The click of billiard balls came from a large, green table which occupied most of the rear of the room. Six men and another woman were watching two dragoons at play. Every time one of the soldiers shot, coins changed hands, and a chorus of noisy encouragements or deprecations followed.

One of the women left her companions and came over to join Artillery almost before he had seated himself. "With your permission, senor."

He knew instantly it was Ellen, the German widow, for her Spanish had the same guttural accent of Rudolf Stetler, who had sat in the game in Fernandina. Closer, he saw that her light blue eyes were faded and her soft skin wrinkled, as Celine's had been. Still, her clothes were good. She smelled fresh and clean, and had managed to retain some traces of her hard, flamboyant beauty.

"An honor, madam." Artillery half rose.

Ellen took the chair beside him. The other couple was watching, and as soon as she was seated, turned away. A Negro in a dirty white apron came up grinning and made a bow.

Artillery said, "I'm about to order food and wine. It will be an honor if you join me. I've eaten nothing since early today."

Ellen shook her head. "I've just finished, senor. I can recommend the fried shrimps and tomatoes. They are fine. I'll drink with you with pleasure."

Artillery gave his order and included a bottle of wine.

"You're a stranger here," she said when the waiter had gone.

"*Si*, senorita. But how did you know?" Artillery asked with a smile. "Do I have the appearance of one from the woods who is not able to find my way?"

She shook her head. "Your generosity betrays you. You must be someone of prominence, for I watched your escort to the governor's mansion this afternoon. But there's still another reason—you ordered a bottle. St. Augustine is so poor, senor, that no native has ever bought me more than a glass of wine. You have friends here?"

"No, senorita—none."

The waiter returned with Artillery's food, and opened the wine. Ellen sat silent while the meal was served, taking stock of Artillery's yellow hair, the cut of his clothes, and his weapons below the edge of the table.

Rid of the waiter, she raised her glass. "*A su salud!*" She set it down and gave a sigh. "This is carnival week, senor. St. Augustine is always gay, but doubly so at carnival. You'll have no trouble making friends. The Spanish girls are pretty, and freer here than they are in Spain. You'll be overflowed with partners for the ball."

"Senorita, you flatter me."

"'Tis the other way about." She filled her glass. "I have passed the stage where I think that flattery of any man can gain an end. The men of St. Augustine are dark. Believe me, senor, a head of shining hair such as yours will cause something of a sensation among the senoritas of the town. Meantime"—she smiled at him over her brimming glass—"Ellen Miller welcomes you. If you find yourself lonely, we could become better acquainted. I am of an amiable disposition, senor, and you might even learn something from me. *Quien sabe?*"

She put her hand on Artillery's knee beneath the table. The warmth of her palm was arousing and seductive, and mingled soothingly with the intoxicating headiness of the Spanish wine. For a second, McIntosh's warning was forgotten. Then it came back full force to plague him: "She'll rob you neatly, I promise, should you be so foolish as to be fired by her cozening."

"I am tired tonight, senorita." His courtesy was discouraging.

"*Buenos.*" She removed her hand. "Tomorrow, perhaps? There are interesting landmarks to be seen. Should you find the heat uncomfortable"—she glanced at him archly—"we might visit the cathedral toward the middle of the day."

"I am' not of your faith, senorita."

"Who spoke of faith, senor?" she laughed and patted his hand. "For many of the older people the cathedral is a place of siesta as well as worship. It is used by the younger, too. Its interior is dark and cool, senor, and while the seats of the pews are narrow and hard, the backs are shielding and high. Father Michael O'Reilly, the *vicario,* has protested many times that he would prefer that worshipers of the goddess Venus confine their rites to some less sacred edifice. What is one to do, senor, with money so infrequently seen and space so scarce in the town?"

She broke off, watching a man who had come in the door. He wore a tight-sleeved cutaway coat, with a black and white striped vest. A wide, white choker, knotted in front, closed tightly around his scrawny neck, fastening his high cheek collar, which stuck up on each side of his narrow face over a shirt of pouter frill. His eyes were birdlike, his hawk nose long, and his mouth the beak of a snapping turtle, small and cruel. His breeches were black and his stockings white, but it was his pumps that caught Artillery's eye. Shiny black, they were long and narrow and built to add to the man's diminutive stature by a pair of high, red heels. The whole was topped with a *chapeau bras,* very narrow and very high, and coming to a sharp point in front and back, as though somehow he had managed to cram his head into half of an almond shell.

Looking neither to right nor left, with a military snap he tucked his short, heavy cane beneath his arm and strode to the back of the smoky room to watch the billiard game.

At his entrance, Artillery felt a change. The inn had been light and carefree. When the red heels had stopped their tapping, the voices of the gamblers were just as loud, the billiard balls clicked as steadily, the waiter's grin was just as wide, yet the atmosphere was not the same. Unaccountably, the entire tone had altered from light to heavy.

Ellen Miller's blue eyes reflected the difference. Where they had watched Artillery an instant before with more than friendly admiration, they were watchful now. She reappraised him from head to foot with a look that was cautious and meditatively steady.

"You look at me strangely, senorita. Have I done something to offend you?"

"Nothing." A small crease showed between her eyebrows, and she gained some time by sipping wine. "You stopped listening to what I was saying, and I thought you knew the man who just came in."

"I never saw him before."

"Yet he seemed to be of interest to you, senor. I followed your glance as he walked to the rear. Undoubtedly, you were watching him."

"I found his shoes of interest, senorita. I don't think I've ever seen red heels before. What is his name?"

"Lope de Zorilla."

"His presence here seems to disturb you."

"It surprises me rather, senor. If you stay here long, you will begin to know him as El Tarantula. Gossip has a way of spreading in this *villorrio,* St. Augustine. He seldom goes anyplace without a purpose, which is well, for his presence is most unwelcome. There are stories, senor, that the cane he carries holds a sword which has vanished as many times in backs as it has in its sheath. I trust, in truth, that his interest here lies neither in you nor me. People in whom El Tarantula has shown an interest, senor, are very few. They have a habit of vanishing, never more to be seen."

Some wine slopped on the table as she poured again. She turned her gaze to the back of the room. "It might be wise for you, senor, if you told me very truthfully what brought you here to St. Augustine."

Artillery had no chance to answer. The street outside was suddenly hideous with a burst of song, "—stuck a feather in his cap and called it macaroni!"

The door of the inn burst open, admitting Captain Ephraim Shanks. His visored cap was shoved to the back of his smooth, bald head, where some miracle kept it on. His double-breasted jacket was flung wide open, his shirt unfastened, leaving half of his barrel chest bare. His weather-tanned face was crimson to the point of explosion, and there was a jovial glint of redness in his china blue eyes.

"May I bed with a virgin mermaid!" he shouted at the sight of Artillery. He walked to the table, unsteadiness adding to his normal ocean roll. "Artillery Armes, the lad himself! May I drink from a swill bucket if I didn't think to hear of you rotting in a Spanish dungeon—and here you sit alive and well, drinking with my own true Ellen, the sweetest doxy in the province!"

Heads were turned from the back of the room at the Captain's roar.

"It's good to see you, Captain. I hope you have news of Amy." Artillery pushed out a chair. "Sit down, won't you, and I'll buy you wine."

"That I'll do, lad!" The Captain's snaggled teeth showed in his

wide-mouthed grin. He collapsed quite suddenly into the chair, and steadied himself by encircling Ellen's waist with one powerful arm. "And how are you, you German baggage?" He tightened his grip on Ellen. "The ships have been scarce, I'm told. Have you had no mariners to rob, my dear?"

"Senor—" Ellen made a useless effort to loosen his arm and push him away.

"Senor, me arse!" said Captain Shanks, and gave Artillery a pleading look. "Hark to her now. She's Spanish when I tell her I love her. She'll speak English quick enough, lad, when she wants you to buy." He turned suddenly and bellowed at the waiter. "Ho, *bastardo!* Bring some rum, a flask of brandy, a beaker of St. Lucar wine, and a mixing bowl."

Artillery said, "But Captain, we already have some wine."

Shanks seized the bottle, tipped it up and lowered its contents an inch or two. "Save it, lad, and we'll add it to the grog I'm mixing. It can't be tasted there. The water in this hellhole has been strained through a nest of rotten eggs, and I'm having to fill my ship's casks with it. I tasted a mug this evening when we landed, and a lot of grog must pass my palate to wash away the herons that have roosted there." He pounded his fist on the table. "Hurry, *bastardo!* My friends and I are dry."

The Negro scampered off on his errand, goaded by the Captain's truculent tone. Shanks paused a moment, searching the room. "Where's the good Buckhart, lad? Don't tell me he's not with you. I hope to see more Antigua rum trickle down those whiskers before I die."

"You won't, sir," said Artillery. "He was killed in a raid on John Houston McIntosh's plantation a few days after you sailed from Fernandina. I thought you would have heard, sir. The news seems to have traveled the province."

"It's not traveled the seas," the Captain said more gently. "Nor has it reached into Georgia, where I talked with Marshal Quentin in Savannah while I was loading less than a fortnight ago." His voice grew very low. "The truth is, Quentin had just returned from Washington, and had a message to be delivered to Doctor Buckhart or you, should I chance upon you here or in Fernandina."

"Caution, Captain," Ellen whispered quickly in English. "I did not know Senor Armes knew Senor McIntosh. I know now what brought Zorrilla here. Even your lowered voice carries. He stands at the back of the room."

The black came up, carrying three bottles and a bowl, and

stood beside the Captain's chair. Shanks disengaged his arm from Ellen and searched his pocket for a piece of gold. "Well, put them down, galley scum!" He held up the coin and pointed to the table. The black set down bottles and bowl, and stood waiting. Shanks gave him the coin. "*Fuera!* Your ears flap like a rotting topsail! Come near me again before I call, and I'll tear one off to drink from. *Vamos!* You're standing to windward of me, and you smell like a rotting whale!"

The waiter left. Shanks began to hum softly to himself as he poured and mixed his concoction of brandy, wine, and rum. "It's a mixture I learned in the Bahamas," he said when mugs were dipped. "It's the brandy that does it. No matter how bad it is, it takes away the sourness of the wine and the sweetness of the rum." He lifted his mug. "I'm sorry, lad, though I may not show it. I drink to Ezekiel Buckhart's soul. May it rest in peace. A Christian—a fighter—and, rarest of all, a gentleman."

Artillery drained his potion, and felt his eyes grow smarting at the burn.

"I'll tell you the news from Quentin," said Shanks. "It will interest you, too, me buxom-bosomed lady. You might well have gone on to Charleston, lad, with Amy. There'll be no rousing of settlers nor messages to be carried from Jefferson to McIntosh. Word's about that Congress is appropriating two million dollars to buy the province of Florida from Spain."

Artillery's heart lightened. The knots of his problem were cut in an instant by the Captain's words. He was no more a traitor, no more a hireling of a country he had never seen. He could look all men in the face again, live clean, and plan his future.

"You mean that Senor McIntosh and Marshal Quentin won't need my services any longer?"

"You've got it, lad," said Captain Shanks. "And you, Ellen, m'love, can rid your pretty head of your clever plotting. In a year you'll both be living in the United States of America, instead of Spain. There'll be peace for all and safety with American gunboats guarding you in the river." He dipped the dripping mugs again. "Now tell me, lad, just what have you done?"

"I've done nothing, Captain, that I know of."

"Then it's something you don't know of," said Captain Shanks, "and I mean to find out. Who have you talked to since you entered the town?"

"To no one, sir, but Don Jose de Reduro. His Excellency, Governor White, is ill. I was supposed to get in touch with Mr. Hulbert

through Ellen here, but I had no time to tell her before you came in."

"'To no one,' he says, 'except Don Jose de Reduro.'" Shanks choked, and drank the rest of his liquor. "I'll put you in touch with Hulbert, lad. I'm on my way to his house right now to get payment for some weeping willow cuttings and Bermuda grass seed brought him from Savannah. You're coming with me and not leaving my sight till I find what's what. Finish your mug. You'll need it. You ought to be back in swaddling clothes. Zorrilla's not here for nothing, lad. He's a slimy crud of Reduro's. If he doesn't get his knife in your guts in twenty-four hours, he'll be out of a job as you are. The province is far from changing hands, and until it does you'll find it's harder to stay alive than outwit a good official of ancient Spain."

9

ARTILLERY WAS GLAD when the Captain rose and made a move to go. He had grown thirsty and the grog in the bowl was running low. The last pouring served only to fill the mugs halfway. Artillery drank his in a gulp and felt thirstier. He discovered that Ellen was sitting closer to him and that her hand had returned to his knee. He resolutely got to his feet.

"I'll see you again, senor, won't I?" she asked him.

Her voice sounded very musical, and full of mysterious promise. He had sat there for an hour without noticing how beautiful she was. Few women had so much of such a rounded figure or such an attractive art of curling hair. It might be nice to kiss her. He doubted if she would mind. The inn and all its patrons was very convivial, light, and full of an airy freedom. St. Augustine was full of an airy freedom.

He leaned over and kissed her full on the lips, and found it quite worthwhile. Instead of objecting, she locked a hand tight in the back of his hair.

"Save your wenching," said Captain Shanks.

Artillery loosed himself and mumbled, "*Hasta manana.*" The kiss made him reckless. "I'll buy another bowl of grog, sir."

"And fall on your face in an alley," said Shanks. "That's not a tit you've been suckling, lad. It's a drink designed by cannibals to clear the throat of human flesh when the meat's too rare."

The Captain started toward the door. Artillery shouldered his saddlebags and followed. It was obvious that Shanks had had too much to drink. He would be better when he got him out in the open.

They started up the narrow Calle de las Puertas together. The saddlebags across Artillery's shoulder were heavy. He could still feel the clutch of Ellen's hand at the back of his hair. He had forgotten something, but it was difficult to think just what it was.

"Your pardon, sir," said Artillery, "but you're leaning on me." He felt friendly toward the Captain.

"It's a house I'm leaning against," said Shanks. "I know a house when I feel one. I know a lass when I feel one. Straighten up, lad. We've business to do." The Captain began to sing *Sweet Robin.*

Artillery joined him, and it sounded keenly harmonious. He was worried. Even now that he had him outside, Shanks was still unsteady.

Artillery stopped. "I've forgotten my horse, sir."

The Captain leaned against a house, and thought. "Your horse?"

"Black Cloud. She's in the stables at the inn."

"And my ship's in the basin," said Shanks. "What would we want with a horse and a ship?"

"We're going to the Hulberts," Artillery reminded him.

"The Hulberts," said Shanks. "That's true, lad—that's very true. We'll need neither the horse nor the ship when we get there."

The street was suddenly full of music and figures. The figures bore down on them steadily. Torches were flaring. Lights showed on balconies. The town came alive with shouts and song. For one dizzy moment, Artillery remembered the war-painted braves who had burst from the trees at early dawn in the Indian village and the children with their cunning masks of birds and beasts. His head began to swim with the same weird nightmare.

He was in a crowd of dancing punchinellos. Harlequins whirled about him. Nobody was human. Masks covered faces as though, sensing the gold in the saddlebags, he had been stopped by a group of fantastic highwaymen. A shimmering clown thrust a stick in Artillery's face and tickled his nose with feathers. His hand crept toward his tomahawk, but the Captain pushed it down.

"They don't want to fight, lad. It's near Lent, and the carnival's on. These revelers are parading the town."

Artillery gave a sheepish grin.

"*Hola, amigos!*" A devil ran up, clutching a trailing tail in one hand and a bottle in the other. "You look unhappy. This will bring you health. Smile and laugh, *amigos,* for all is gay."

He handed the bottle to Artillery, who got three good swallows of smooth, sweet wine before the Captain snatched it from him.

"He's forgotten his horse," said Captain Shanks, and poured half the bottle in him.

"*Si,*" said the devil. "A serious loss, *amigos.* Once I forgot a wench in Spain—but she remembered me." He retrieved the bottle from Captain Shanks, waved his tail, and mingled with the revelers.

Artillery's saddlebags felt very heavy. He found a doorstep behind him, and suddenly sat.

A man was holding a bird. The man was black as ebony, except for a crimson domino that covered his eyes. From neck to heels he was clad in a bright red gown. The gown was too short and revealed a pair of bare black feet planted firmly in the sandy street. The bird he held was big as a chicken, and roosted on top of a ten-foot pole, which the black kept continuously bobbing. Instead of feathers, the bird was covered with ribbons.

Artillery sat quite still, regarding it. It must be wood. Ribbons of different colors had never sprouted from any bird he had ever seen in the swamps or on the prairies.

"It's a bird," he said to Captain Shanks.

"A patgo bird," the Captain agreed. "You look cozy, lad. Do you mind if I sit down?"

"Not at all, sir," Artillery told him politely. "If there's not enough room on the steps here, I'll move off onto the ground."

"They pin ribbons on it," the Captain said, and carefully settled himself.

Violins and guitars took up a new wail. Artillery felt his dizziness returning. The black man with the bird on the pole was standing inside of a circle. Clowns and devils and harlequins had joined hands about him, and were dancing round and round. The black man suddenly gave a yell, stretched out one long arm full length, and held up the bird on the pole.

"See?" said Shanks. "She's going to pin one on."

Artillery, with an effort, looked up to the balcony across the street, where torches lit the smiling face of a comely Spanish girl. The bird on the pole moved closer, and the girl took a ribbon from around her hair, leaned out from the balcony, and pinned it amongst the others. There were yells and cheers. The bird was lowered. The dancers stopped. More singing started.

A harlequina, masked in white velvet, detached herself from the crowd, stopped before Artillery, and pirouetted in a whirl

that stood her full dress of black and white out straight around her.

"*Magnifica, senorita!*" cried the Captain, his gaze on the slender legs revealed.

The girl picked off the Captain's cap and pressed a kiss on his egg-bald head, then laughed and kissed Artillery's lips with a warmth that made him still more dizzy.

The music and singing grew louder, and the procession moved on, to stop at another balcony nearer to the inn.

"Tomorrow, they'll shoot at it," said Captain Shanks

"At what?" Artillery rubbed the back of his hand against his forehead. He was in the middle of one of those fantasies that never end and never begin.

"The bird," said Shanks.

"What for? It's wooden, Captain. What do they want to shoot it for?"

"It's the patgo," said Shanks. "Governor White brought the idea here from Pensacola. If you kill the bird, you can lead the kick-up and pick any girl who's pinned on a ribbon."

"It's very interesting," Artillery told him. "What is a kick-up?"

"A dance—a ball." The Captain got up by placing his hands against the side of the house.

Artillery had another thought. "How can you kill the bird if it's dead?"

"You can't," said Shanks, looking down at him pityingly. "They shoot at it with fowling pieces."

"Oh," said Artillery.

"You wait until tomorrow and see," Shanks told him. "They'll be holding posy dances tonight, too. Come on. There's always plenty of bombo, and if we follow the crowd, they'll let us in."

"We're going to the Hulberts," Artillery reminded him.

"It's a long way," said Shanks, "and my gullet's a deck that needs sluicing."

He reached down to help Artillery rise, and all at once sank to the step again. Slowly and with caution, they both got up together.

"What you need, lad," the Captain said, "is someone like me to teach you just a little bit about original sin."

"That man's following us," said Artillery.

"What man?"

"That El Tarantula, with the red heels."

The Captain looked around. "Where?"

"He stuck his head out of an alley." Artillery pointed. "I saw

his chapeau." Confusion beset him. "Listen, Captain Shanks, we left him at the inn."

"He must have gotten out somehow," the Captain admitted after studying the matter.

"He must have," Artillery agreed, "or he couldn't be back there."

"That settles it," said Shanks. "I'm not going to be spitted walking through alleys with you. Let's stay with the crowd." He linked his arm in Artillery's.

The devil greeted their reappearance with another drink of wine. Somebody covered their faces with masks. The harlequina tied a ribbon in Artillery's hair. The crowd moved on into wider streets. Through an open door of a larger house, Artillery saw a little altar, bright with fifty candles and banked with pots of vivid flowers, framed in Spanish moss. Around the room more flowers were strung—cardinals and swamp milkweeds, warm and scarlet in the candlelight, white pond lilies, blue skullcaps, the deep rich purple of gentians, and the paler contrasting colors of twenty more.

Artillery had a single glimpse of two girls inside and an elder couple before the crowd swarmed in through the open door. There were greetings in many languages—Spanish, English, and the mixed patois of *lingua franca.*

"They are Minorcans," the Captain whispered through the din. "Listen to that *lingua franca.* They take English, Spanish, German, French, Greek, and Seminole, and kick it around on the floor."

Five musicians detached themselves and ranged along the wall, striking up a cotillon march. Artillery found himself paired with the harlequina. The older couple took their places and led the gay procession around the room. It was hot, and after several circles, the smell of the flowers and candles began to cloy.

Artillery was glad when the marching stopped, and he located Captain Ephraim Shanks performing depredations on a bombo bowl. Artillery accepted a goblet from the Captain, and hesitated. "Are we being unmannerly, sir?"

"Lad, it's never unmannerly to take a drink of rum."

"I mean about being here. We've had no invitation."

"Invitation be damned!" said Captain Shanks. "You don't get invitations to a posy ball—you just come."

"They're very hospitable," said Artillery.

"You're raddled," Shanks told him. "Why are they hospitable? The girls light the candles and string up flowers. The beaux of

the town see the lights and drop in. If the girls like one of them, they give him a bouquet, and that's an invitation to the kick-up. If he's going with some other wench, he has to refuse the flowers. If he refuses the flowers, he has to pay for the rum and the candles and the music and the bouquet. These Spaniards do nothing but have carnivals and kick-ups and shoot billiards. You'll find twenty more houses lighted up just like this one, lad, from here to the far end of town."

"I find it very confusing," said Artillery.

"Now don't you," said Shanks. "Everything's confusing to you, lad. You're too serious. Here—drink more bombo and wash your sorrows."

The harlequina came up and took Artillery's hand. The music began to play a waltz. He felt himself whirling, spinning in tipsy cadence. Nothing was still. The flowers were gyrating. The flames of the candles were tiny circles. The world hung on a pivot, reeling insanely. Life became naught but a giddy round.

He was holding the harlequina too close, but he liked it. He could feel her breasts against him. Every inflection of her pliant body moved in unison with his own. She was trim and lissome, gay and tender, light in his arms when he swung her as a wisp of floating down.

"I'm glad we've met again so soon," she said in English.

"So am I."

"You don't even know me," she protested.

They stopped in a corner. She moved her black-and-white harlequin hat and gave him a peek at her bronze-gold hair. She raised her mask for a second, and let her blue eyes laugh into his own.

"I know you now," he said. "You were riding Whitecap this afternoon."

"How gallant you are!" Her red lips pouted mockingly. "I give you a kiss; you hold me so tight I'm fainting, and the only thing you remember about me is my mare!"

"I'm good with horses," said Artillery.

She replaced her mask and stared at him gravely through the narrow slits. "You must be—since you come as one to a costume ball."

"Since I come as one what?" Artillery was beginning again to feel the need for outside air.

"A horse, of course," she told him. "We all decided that when first we saw you."

"I'm sorry if I remind you of a horse, madam." Artillery stepped back unsteadily, and gave her a formal bow.

"*La,* you're impossible!" She came near to him again and put her hand on his arm. "It's the saddlebags," she told him. "They must be representing something, since they've beaten against me during all of the time we were waltzing. Or perhaps it's a custom of the province here. Any way I take it, Mr. Armes, they strike me as such awkward things to wear."

"A thousand pardons," Artillery muttered. "I'd forgotten them. The Captain says I'm raddled, which I'm beginning to fear is true. The bags have all I own of value in them. The truth is, I carry them with me because I'm afraid to leave them anywhere. Might I ask how you know my name?"

"From Lieutenant Sanchez, who escorted you into town. He's the devil over there. I'm Bethany Hulbert."

"But you can't be!" said Artillery.

"And why, I pray?"

"Because Captain Shanks and I were going to the Hulberts' house, and we're not yet there. I heard of you from John Houston McIntosh. It was really to see your father that I came to St. Augustine."

"I've had enough of this dancing." She sobered suddenly. "You don't seem to be accomplishing your purpose with any great speed. Since you come from Mr. McIntosh, I know that my father will want to talk with you. Come."

Bethany guided him skillfully through the crowd, collecting Captain Shanks en route. "There are too many posy balls and too many bowls of bombo between here and my house," she said as they reached the door. "You'll be safer if you have a guide to take you there."

She walked between them, and the feel of her hand in the crook of his arm, coupled with the costume she wore, added an elfin magic to the storybook houses. The streets became a fairy web of volatile and spritely lines, a network of happiness. On frosty mornings when he was young, he had seen such lines in the forest and known they were cities designed by tiny, carefree denizens, no taller than the blades of grass. The masters of the town were little folks who laughed with the sound of dropping water falling in a stream. Unless one had a heart that was light, as the heart of a child, they were never to be seen.

The Captain sang, and Beth and Artillery joined in. He thought of her as Beth already, and could not understand it. She was part

of a world he had never known, and would never know, part of one of the New World's growing cities, not a fairy one, yet she seemed in an instant to take the place of everything he had ever lost and most of the things he had ever loved, as though life had said, "Here's Amy and Dad and Doctor Zeke. Here's the laughter and the beauty and the affection of the young Celine."

She was carnival; she was gaiety. She was the youth of a nation with strength enough to wrest itself free of England. She was the shops of New York and the boulevards of Paris. She was the spirit of his first night in St. Augustine.

As he laughed and sang with Beth and the Captain, Dauna crept into his happiness, and strangely, her coming made his happiness clear. For the first time since he was grown, he understood the thoughts which had nearly torn him asunder on the night he wanted Angela and the teachings of the Bible had fought against the poetry of John Donne.

Body and spirit must always merge. Life must always hold contrast. There could be no cursing without some prayer, no bitter moments without some fun, no cities unless the majesty of wastelands had once been there. Dark and light; day and night; man and woman; joy and sorrow; song and tears; Bethany and Dauna. They were both the same, for every extreme must be an extreme from something else, and consequently both were one.

Dauna was the fire of the graziers, casting a pall of smoke at sundown, flickering through the trees at night, devastating and ruthlessly consuming, so that once more with the peace of spring the grass might come up green. Dauna was the nonunderstandable, the ripples on slaty water made by the snout of the swimming ageless gator. Dauna was the soul of a wretch in the Fernandina slave house, so strong and so fierce that no man-forged shackle could ever imprison it; so molten-white that no human filth could ever render it unclean.

Dauna was blood and battle, the peaceful rest of the tired soldier, the dreamless sleep that followed potent passion. Hidden in her quiet laugh was the quickening scream of the panther. Her carriage was the strength of all the Indians and of everything wild. Her dignity was the speech of Cheti Haiola.

Artillery sang and his heart was light, but its lightness was split. Love walked beside him and clung to his arm, for Beth could be loved. But Dauna was life, and life had kept him in Florida and brought him to St. Augustine.

10

DANIEL HULBERT was still up when they reached the house. Lights from the windows made dots on the surface of Maria Sanchez Creek flowing past the door. Elsewhere about the house, except where the verandah overlooked the water, orange trees formed a screen. They were thick and old, and so fruitful that props were needed to hold up many a sinking bough.

Hulbert was a man who should have had such a daughter. He was reading when they arrived, and relinquished his book, neither surprised nor disturbed at the advent of Captain Shanks and Artillery. He kissed Bethany without questioning her, and stood with an arm about her waist as she made the introductions, then said, "Sit down, gentlemen. You've done me an honor. Sit down."

He lacked the hard fitness of John Houston McIntosh, for his body tended toward the portliness of good living. His sandy hair, brushed up in front and down in back, displayed a part that ran across from ear to ear. His face was broad and full of wit, but not lacking in strength. His wide-set eyes were as blue as Beth's, and estimated his visitors with an expression that was friendly but keen.

"Mr. Armes is the visitor I told you about, Father—the one with the drums and the soldiers." Bethany perched herself on the arm of her father's chair and coquettishly mussed his pompadour. "Has Mother retired?"

"Yes," he said, and took her hand in both his own. "You'll pardon my wife, Mistress Sarah, gentlemen. She's not strong and has suffered for some time with a bronchial complaint which was worsened by the rigor of New York winters. Though she's improving through the balminess of the climate here, she's still not strong."

He looked at Bethany's trim black-stockinged leg swinging beneath the shortness of the harlequina gown. "I should apologize for this wanton display of my daughter, too. Her limbs are little covered for a minx turned eighteen, but it's the times, gentlemen. The forwardness of children today is something that was never tolerated when her mother and I were young. Then we leave New York for Florida, where my wife expects all the rigid proprieties of church and ancient Spain, only to find the natives still more free."

"Solomon!" She kissed him on the nose and stretched out her leg. "Why should I conceal it? Is it thick, or the leg of a serving-

maid, that you wouldn't have it shown? Now tell Mother, and she'll tell Father O'Reilly, and all of you can put me in a convent."

Hulbert laughed. "You see what my life is, gentlemen. I accepted my wife's religion when we settled here, since she wished it and the laws of Spain so required. I'll say I found it comforting, except for my daughter, who seems to have no religion."

"My religion is you and Mother. Your beliefs, Father, are my own."

"Be off!" said Hulbert, and pushed her gently from the arm of his chair. "You cajole with too much skill, and these gentlemen are as dry as I am. They'll be wanting rum."

Artillery mumbled a feeble protest, and was rewarded with a jab from the Captain's muscular arm. This time he had taken good care to place the cumbersome saddlebags on the floor beside him.

Bethany brought the drinks, and her father looked at a ponderous watch. "Now off to bed!"

She kissed her father, then turned and dropped a mocking curtsy to the Captain and Artillery, holding her black-and-white skirt out wide. "I've one request before I go."

"Your servant," Artillery stammered.

"That you gentlemen unmask," she said. "I like to see what my partners look like at the end of an evening's fun."

Hulbert's jovial laugh rang out again. "They're gentlemen indeed, daughter, retaining their dominoes since you have retained your own."

She unmasked herself. Artillery, following with the Captain, had a chance again to be caught by the fullness of her piquant beauty.

Hulbert said, "Dash me, Mr. Armes, when you were with McIntosh, did he have a chance to see you with that bright red bow in your hair?"

"I put it there, Father," Beth said reprovingly.

Artillery reached up and untied the bow that Beth had fixed when he sat on the doorstep. When she held out her hand, he shook his head, rolled up the red satin band, and put it in his pocket. "A trophy for the horse's mane," he told her.

Shanks was grinning. "I like you better with the ribbon, lad. It's something the best of my seamen wear, but a good gold earring is needed with it. I'll have one for you from some foreign port the next time we meet. Together, they'll give you the touch that you need—a truly raffish air."

Bethany said before she left them, "And when you get the earring, Mr. Armes, I truly hope I'm there."

Daniel Hulbert lit his pipe and settled back expectantly.

"My business is soon completed, sir," said Captain Shanks. "I've a bill of lading for weeping willow cuttings and Bermuda grass seeds brought you from Savannah. They'll be delivered tomorrow. I'd not have you think I'm pressing for payment, but the only coin I'll see in port is from John Forbes and Company and yourself. The Spanish give me *libranzas*, due in ninety days, for pay and sometimes I've carried the same around the world with me and then gotten no gold when they were finally presented for collection."

Hulbert puffed. "You'll have your money tomorrow, Captain. And you, young man—what did the good John McIntosh have to say?"

Artillery concentrated on his story with an effort. There seemed to be a double potency in Daniel Hulbert's rum. As he talked, he looked at the Captain with admiration, for Shanks had straightened and lighted his own strong pipe, seemingly unaffected by what he had drunk, except for an undue redness of eye and a solemn appearance, which reminded Artillery of a bald-headed owl.

"Now it seems," said Shanks, when Artillery had concluded, "that for all his willingness to help the United States, the lad finds himself with his work all done. I told him tonight that I had word from Marshal Quentin that Congress has before it a two-million-dollar appropriation to purchase Florida from Spain. What think you, sir?"

"I think the bill will not be passed." Hulbert emitted a pensive cloud that wreathed his graying hair. "If it's passed, I think the purchase will never be made."

"I'm interested in your reasons, sir," said Captain Shanks.

"They stem from the fact," said Hulbert, "that I've been too close to Jefferson."

"You mean you know him, sir?"

"Quite well, Mr. Armes." Hulbert smiled at the force of Artillery's sudden interest. "I talked with him in Washington not six months ago. He's something of a linguist like yourself, with a knowledge of Greek, French, Spanish, and Italian, as well as some Latin and Anglo-Saxon."

"I'm scarcely a linguist, sir," Artillery protested. "I know Spanish, French, English, and some Seminole, but that's all."

"Enough to give you a right to the name," said Hulbert. "The President's an extraordinary man, for he's a higher mathematician, making large use of calculus, as well as a good singer and dancer, one

of the best horsemen in the country, and an accomplished master of the violin.

"I tell you this because you must understand that the more a man knows, the more he will be criticized by the ignorant. For all his trust and confidence in the people, Mr. Armes, their continued unjustified criticism has made him very suspicious. Since the Louisiana Purchase, in which he spent on his own authority an amount almost three-fourths of the national debt sanctioned by Congress, I doubt, sir, if Thomas Jefferson would support two million dollars more for the purchase of Florida. His feeling is that the United States is rightly possessed of West Florida now."

"But this raiding, sir, and this violence and killing. I've seen nothing else since I was born, as I've heard all my life that it can never be stopped by Spain." Artillery grew expansive under the warming rum. "My love is for Florida, sir, no matter what country rules it. That's why I agreed to work for Marshal Quentin and Mr. McIntosh. Now if the United States decides not to buy it, either this violence will continue or—"

"Florida will be annexed by other means," Daniel Hulbert broke in. "You have the admirable hotheadedness of youth, young man, and I envy you. Have you ever played chess, sir?"

Artillery said, "I know something of the game."

"But not as played by nations," Hulbert told him. "On the chessboard of the world, there are many ways of occupying an opponent's square, and all are not necessarily the same. Thomas Jefferson dresses simply, Mr. Armes—negligently and down-at-heel. It has deceived many foreign statesmen who have had the idea there was something negligently simple about his brain. He has never been one to lack the courage of his convictions. The United States must have this province before it's possessed by England or France."

"But you've said you don't think they'll buy it, sir."

"I don't," said Hulbert. "Nor may Spain wish to sell. Every American who has settled here since seventeen eighty-three has been made ex officio, either directly or indirectly, an agent of the United States. The Spanish know it as well as we, which is why within the past few months, since I moved here, all American immigration has been rigidly forbidden by Spain. They're far too late, Mr. Armes. Your work for John Houston McIntosh is merely marking time. Rebellion will be fomented among the settlers. Florida will not be bought from Spain, Mr. Armes. It will be taken away."

"You mean by war?"

"A pastime of fools," said Hulbert, "and not Thomas Jefferson's

game. The President's a frontiersman, sir. Have you ever heard of Shays' Rebellion?"

"In Massachusetts? I've read of it, sir."

"It was a time," said Hulbert, "when the freedom of democracy overfreed itself and went astray. There was much violence, Mr. Armes. It will interest you, concerning that rebellion, what Thomas Jefferson had to say: 'A little rebellion now and then is a good thing. God forbid that we should be twenty years without one. What signify a few lives lost? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants: It is its natural manure.' Are you shocked, Mr. Armes?"

"I'm afraid I'm confused, sir," said Artillery. "I met a man who owned an inn. At the inn were a grazier, a hunter, and a woodsman —all Spanish. I also had lunch with a settler and his wife. They lived in an humble log cabin, and a baby crawled on the floor. I've lived among the Indians. What you've just said now has made me think. So far as I know, the raid on Mr. McIntosh's plantation was conducted by Don Jose de Reduro, but the men who were with him came from Georgia, across the United States border. I've seen other raids, and every time they were carried out by scum from Georgia."

"You needn't go on, Mr. Armes." Hulbert knocked out his pipe in a bowl beside him. "I know quite well what you're going to say—that all this violence which has gone on and all this rebellion which is fomenting is the fault of the citizens of the United States, those who are there and those who have settled here. You can continue further that none of the violence you have seen in your life has been the fault of the citizens of Spain."

"And I'll say that's true," Captain Shanks put in, "at the risk of giving my own country a dastardly name."

"I guess that's what I mean, sir," said Artillery. "The Spanish imprisoned Dan McKetch, but as I've grown older, I've seen that Dan was lawless. Really, outside of a single man, Don Jose, I hold no hatred for Spain. It's these gentle, happy people, sir, that worry me, and the Indians, for those I know are happy, too. Is a rebellion to be started and this province taken by the United States without the Indians or the native Spaniards who live here having a say?"

"It's not the fault of the gentle, happy people here that Spain is passing, Mr. Armes." Hulbert's eyes were kindly. "It's the weakness of a fruit outwardly sound but rotten in the center that gives life to such worms as Don Jose. The governors here are men of integrity, the people of St. Augustine indolent and peaceful, kind to their slaves, law-abiding and not church-ridden. All that entitles them to

double protection, Mr. Armes, which the mother country, clinging to its ancient pomp and mixing affairs of church and state to breed internal corruption, is unable to give them today. Their loyalty and the loyalty of the Indians is to something that no longer exists—the Spain that once was powerful. Today it's a fort, with only walls. The old Castillo de San Marcos could be taken by a single man if neither men nor guns were inside. Yet, from the outside, Mr. Armes, the empty fort might look impregnably strong.

"That's what Thomas Jefferson sees. These people here and the Indians can still be happy, given understanding strength behind them. England failed to hold this province when she had it. She would like it again, for trouble is brewing between her and my country which may ripen into war. Napoleon is greedily watching, and only his fear of the United States keeps him from instantly stepping in and grabbing it all. It's to give these people the strength of being part of a united nation for which Thomas Jefferson is working, Mr. Armes. The flames of time are consuming them along with Spain. Unless they are snatched from the fire, their days will not be long."

Artillery looked at the candles on the table. The night was very calm and still, and the flames stood high and long. The flames of time! Those were what he thought of on the night he rode with Dan and Doctor Zeke out of Cheti Haiola's village. He remembered the abandoned English plantation and the thought that some day he and all the horsemen riding behind him would be part of a skeleton army. Beth would be part of the army, too, and Dauna.

Were the flames of time what kept him living? Was the world full of helpless tapers, candles of different lengths and colors ignited at birth to give light to others and be snuffed at the end of some predetermined span? Was love a flame, melting your blood into red-hot liquid to be cooled in the end by death, the snuffer? It seemed a logical fantasy. Napoleon had proved indeed that the whole world could be threatened by a wild, destructive conflagration ignited from the selfish torch of a single man.

Hulbert rose. "My home is at your disposal, gentlemen. I have extra night clothes and two vacant bedrooms downstairs across the hall."

"And I, a ship that awaits me in the harbor," said Shanks, "though your offer will be remembered should you or your family have need of transportation in the future to any port where we're bound."

"My mare, Black Cloud, is stabled at La Candiotera. I would never dream of imposing, sir." Artillery stood up circumspectly.

Maria Sanchez Creek was muttering discreetly through the silence. "Are you troubled with animals, sir?"

"We're overplagued by wolves and panthers, but my stock's well penned and safe, Mr. Armes."

"I had a notion," said Artillery, "that something larger than a wolf or a panther has been moving through the grove outside."

Hulbert smiled. "A night of stillness such as this is full of uncanny sound. I'll be hurt, Mr. Armes, if you stay at the inn. You've rendered a service to McIntosh which is a service to me as well. You'll find that my house, while not pretentious, offers far better accommodations than you are likely to find elsewhere. You can send for your mare in the morning."

Shanks said quickly, "He can walk back to the ship with me, collect his mare, and return tonight, if 'tis not too late, Mr. Hulbert. I've news of Amy McKetch in Charleston, which I know he'd like to hear, and I've had no chance to give it."

"Agreed," said Hulbert. "I'll be reading for an hour yet. You can leave your saddlebags here with safety. There's little thievery here of any but petty things since the city gates are the only exit."

"I'd like it, sir," Artillery said frankly, "and I'll try not to be too long." He was weary, but he felt that a walk was needed to clear his senses before sleeping.

"No need to hurry," said Hulbert. "If I've retired, I'll leave a lantern on the hook beside the door. Your saddlebags will be in your room, and your bed turned down. The stable's in the rear. You'll find ample space for your mare."

Once outside, Artillery walked slowly beside the Captain, listening with half an ear to the pleasant news of Amy settling in Charleston. They were still beside the heavy grove, and he strolled with his hand kept close to his pistol, for the threat of El Tarantula had never left his mind. Still, he felt quite safe while Captain Shanks was near. Assassins struck from the back at men who walked alone in darkness. Two men together seldom had anything to fear.

They came to the street which led to the square and found themselves in an open space where the stars made some light.

Artillery said beneath his breath, "El Tarantula's close behind us, sir. If you'll sing loudly, I'll give you my plan."

The Captain, without answering, took up his favorite, *Sweet Robin.*

"Before we enter the thickness of trees by the square, you make as though to leave me. We'll talk quite loud. You're for your ship, and I'm for the inn. I'll make for the nest of byways leading toward

the city gates. You go on a ways, then when you're certain I'm being followed, bring up the rear. I can kill him very quietly once he attacks me, but 'twill be easier to have some help to hide his body."

The Captain stopped his singing. "A plan that's good and justified," he muttered, "except it's tarred with the foolishness of youth. A body can't be hidden in St. Augustine, lad. Reduro will know before dawn who killed his stabbing spider. Then you'll hang for it, lad—which is what he wants. You just heard Mr. Hulbert say that the city gates are the only way out of here."

"Then what must I do?" Artillery asked.

"Disarm him and keep him alive, lad, and quiet, until I join you. You'll not have much trouble, for an assassin who finds the tables turned becomes a man who's yellow with fear."

The Captain took up his song again, and they stopped as agreed before entering the trees.

"*Hasta la vista,*" said Shanks, quite loud in his raucous Spanish. "We part here, lad—me to my ship, and you to your inn. God willing, we'll meet again sometime before another year."

"*Adios, amigo,*" said Artillery.

The Captain was soon hidden down the tree-lined street, except for his song that left traces in the air.

Artillery turned and walked northward, moving swiftly but staggering just a little. He was humming in lightheartedness, but beneath his pose was caution. When he entered the narrow maze of streets, bearing eastward toward the Calle de las Puertas, every step was taken with a hunter's care.

In spite of his care, it was only a fluke that saved him. He had turned into a canyon so narrow he could touch a wall with either hand. Around the first curve, it appeared quite endless, twisting crazily, so that even in brightest daylight the tenants of the foul-smelling houses must have lived without light or air. It was a street of the dead and clung humidly to him as though his life were impeded by unending walls of clinging dampened velvet. All about him he felt that people were living and sleeping and breathing, tossing and rolling restlessly through their half-starved nights, prey to smells and mosquitoes.

His mind was behind him, listening for the red-heeled shoes that could make no sound in the softened muck of the alley. Up ahead, a single light glowed out for a space like a firefly, then died away. It took Artillery's mind from behind him and raised his eyes. The jet-black bulk of a balcony had closed in above his head. It remained unseen, but not unfelt. Like the sleepers around him, he

sensed it, and as he sensed it, he jumped back quick as a cat might spring.

El Tarantula had tricked him. The little man with the bright red heels dropped from above like a diving hawk, but the sword-cane he held went into the ground instead of into Artillery.

He jerked the snarling Zorrilla up with a hand in his collar, then pricked the point of Zorrilla's own sword-cane into the spindly spine.

"March!" he said, and used the toe of his boot to enforce the order.

They were almost out of the alley when Captain Shanks came up behind.

"What now?" asked Artillery.

"To the ship," said Shanks, "where I'll take two drunken friends on board to visit me. The *Blue Dolphin's* shorthanded in crew, lad, for a year ago in St. Augustine we had some trouble, and the spider you hold sank his fangs into a good first mate of mine. He can take his place, or better still, the place of one of my crew whom I'll raise in station. He'll learn fast with a rope on his arse. And while we're out on the seven seas, who knows but we'll find an island he likes—one full of tarantulas. Think of the fun he can have there, lad—breeding more of his kind."

II

ARTILLERY WOKE with sunlight in his eyes, sieved through the mesh of the enveloping mosquito bar. The bronze of ripe oranges pressed against one of the windows. Through the other, he could see the stables, where a singing black was busy on Whitecap with a currycomb. The sun was already high, and guiltily Artillery consulted his watch to find it was nearly nine.

Up and washed, a pleasant sense of aliveness possessed him. There was peacefulness in St. Augustine, a safety which relaxed him from the nervous tenseness he had always known. He decided it was the protection of the fort and the walls and moats and rivers. Danger was cut to a minimum, limited to petty annoyances such as El Tarantula, whose spider's sting had proved no more lethal than a gadfly.

He stood for a space by the open window, breathing in deeply and stretching his arms. The air was sparkling warm and clean. He went to the other window and plucked the largest orange within his

reach. The skin tore from it freely. The golden pulp was tender, and the juice far better than rum.

He returned to his dressing, grinning and voicing by a snatch of song the pleasure of living. The grin was for El Tarantula. The *Blue Dolphin* was not sailing until late in the afternoon. Shanks, expecting a possible visit from searching dragoons, had trussed the little *spadassin* securely and put him in a cask.

"I'll let you out tomorrow night when we've stood out to sea," the Captain had told his snarling, unwilling hand. "Meantime, if you want to make noise, do so, and I'll silence it by running a saber through the bunghole." He had fastened the top of the cask securely and labeled it with a crayon, "Unfermented Wine."

Beth came up to the window and leaned in over the sill. "Good morning, sir."

"It's nearer noon, I'm afraid," said Artillery.

She was wearing her riding habit of the day before, and he thrilled at the sight of her. Other girls had made him feel awkward, but Beth had an ease and lightness about her that gave him a feeling of surety. Even after just a few hours, he found it a joy to see her again. Perhaps it was because she looked more beautiful every time.

"Father's being barbered, and Mother has saved your breakfast."

"An imposition, I feel. I should have been up hours ago."

"You were," she said and wrinkled her nose. "I heard you come in. You're always imposing, aren't you?"

Artillery laughed. "I was taught to be a gentleman by a man who was quick with strap and cane."

"Then you think me very forward, don't you?"

"I never said any such thing. I think you're—"

"Oh, go on and say it," she urged him. "There you go drying up again."

"Lovely," he hazarded.

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "it's not too bad, but Lieutenant Sanchez could do better. He's told me I was a bird on the wing and the heart of several strange Spanish flowers."

"I'll never be able to put my thoughts into words as well as the Spaniards," Artillery told her.

"No," she said with a tiny smile, "I'm afraid you won't. But maybe you mean things more. Father said this morning that you know Don Jose de Reduro."

"Yes," said Artillery, "I know him."

"Then you've heard him talk."

"Yes, I've heard him talk."

"He says even more beautiful things than Lieutenant Sanchez. They're so beautiful that I can never live up to them, but I feel sure they've been said to every pretty girl in the province."

Artillery thought of Angela, locked in the arms of Don Jose at the gate of the compound. "Perhaps they find it effective," he suggested. "I'm fond of poetry, but I don't know how to use it."

"They do. It's a God-given gift to these gentlemen from Spain. I'm riding to the market for staples," she told him, "but I won't be long. Whitecap and Black Cloud have already made friends. If you're ready when I return, we can ride and I'll show you around."

"I'm ready now."

"Nonsense," she said. "There are tricks that any young man in New York could teach you. You must never be too ready for a lady's suggestion. The proper thing to say is, 'I deem it an honor, madam,' and wrinkle your forehead in a frown."

Artillery bowed. "I deem it an honor, madam."

"The tone's all right," Beth told him, "but it's a horribly friendly frown." She pointed to his guitar, which stood in a corner. "Do you play?"

He nodded. "I was taught by a Spanish boy."

"And sing?"

"Loudly, but not too well."

"We shall see," she warned him. "The guitar would have been much nicer to have with you last night than those saddlebags you were carrying. But you'll not be allowed to take it this morning. A guitar is the passport to the heart of a senorita. You can't compete with a Spaniard's poetry, nor I with a Spanish girl's smile. Now eat your breakfast." She turned and blew him a kiss from her fingers, then walked toward the stables.

He watched her, feeling an agreeable intimacy through the memory of her graceful figure, revealed so casually the night before and taunting him now beneath the curving folds of her riding dress.

He left the room, to be greeted by Daniel Hulbert, who sat in a straight-backed chair, well-hidden by a mask of lather and an enveloping barber's gown.

The barber, a slender, mustachioed Spaniard, was honing his razor. He said, "*Buenos dias, senor,*" and made a leg, giving a professional look at Artillery's hair. "I can take you after Senor Hulbert, or should you need some blood-letting or drawing of teeth, you may call at my shop."

"Enough of currying trade in my house, Sebastian," Hulbert

muttered through the lather. "The young man's teeth are as sound as rocks, and he'll need no more blood-letting than that you'll give him while shaving him, though from what I see, his beard's as light as down."

"Ah, but the years roll swiftly, Senor Hulbert," the barber reminded him, unperturbed. "It is well to let your profession be known so that in the future it's common knowledge where you're to be found."

"You'll find my wife in the dining room," Hubert told Artillery. "She'll breakfast with you since she, too, has just come down."

Artillery went in, to be greeted by a slender, gracious woman, whose delicate beauty had found fulfillment in Bethany. Her morning dress was of the palest lavender, with the bodice cut high to a soft turned-down collar. Her hair, much lighter than Beth's bronze-gold, curled in easy ringlets about her forehead. She was very lovely, but the white and rose of her soft unblemished cheeks was waxy and spoke too well of the trouble that had moved her husband to the southland.

"You've brought pleasure to our household, Mr. Armes." There was genuine warmth in her musical voice as Artillery took his chair. "Our daughter's grown lonesome since we moved here, and restless for the company of someone young."

She rang a tinkling silver bell, and an elderly very black housemaid came in with Artillery's breakfast. "While I was not able to entertain much in New York, nevertheless our house was always full of Bethany's young friends. Here we do have lots of people in for tea." She gave a soft sigh. "They're nice enough, but I don't speak Spanish as well as Beth and Daniel do. When you're trying hard to understand the language, Mr. Armes, people never seem the same."

Artillery fell to on his meal of fried trout and hominy. The maid came in with a steaming pot.

Mistress Sarah said, "I'm glad to have coffee for you, too. So many things we had up North are luxuries in St. Augustine."

Artillery listened politely, not interrupting. These cultured people, the Hulberts, like the McIntoshes, represented the outside world, the fascinating lure of distant countries and cities. Mistress Sarah probably knew Jefferson, too. Artillery could drink in their conversation endlessly and with eagerness, supplementing every book he had ever read, bringing to life with vividness each imaginary scene.

The sun crept along and touched a pen-and-ink profile, set in a heavy gilt frame on the wall.

Artillery asked, "Is that Bethany?" and then, shocked by his boldness, stammered, "*Miss* Bethany is what I mean."

Mistress Sarah smiled. "We stand little on formality, Mr. Armes. My daughter would be sure to say that it's 'Beth' you mean. It's a patent profile made from a physiognotrace by two men who came through St. Augustine a few months ago. They call themselves Raphael and Rembrandt Peale, but I don't think their picture is very good, do you?"

"I could tell it was your daughter," said Artillery, "but even then I had to guess."

"You're quite right, Mr. Armes," Mistress Sarah agreed. "I told the men that even though they called themselves Raphael and Rembrandt, I didn't think that art could be made by tracing someone's face with a cumbersome machine. They pointed out that the lines were more accurate than those of the most eminent artists, and that four to thirty-two profiles could be made in a few seconds at a single sitting. We've exchanged with all our friends in town, and still have a dozen more upstairs. I'm sure that Bethany would be glad to give you one."

She lowered her voice. "I argued with Daniel that Mr. Raphael Peale thought more of selling his picture frames than he did of the quality of work done by his machine. Daniel is very strong-minded. He insisted that no woman ever lived who understood the beauty of a machine. He had some made of me and himself, and we've exchanged even with Governor White." She lowered her voice still further. "Very frankly, Mr. Armes, I think they're the most hideous things I've ever seen."

Hulbert stepped in from the sitting room. His pompadoured hair stood up still straighter. The part that ran across the top from ear to ear was geometrically accurate and wider. His florid face was bright with a polished sheen. "Your gentleman of the strap is waiting, sir." He walked direct to the gilded frame. "Have you seen this physiognotrace of my daughter?"

"I noticed it, sir," said Artillery.

"Well, it's accurate to a hair, sir," Hulbert told him. "After you're barbered, I'll give you one, and one of my wife and myself, too."

"An honor," said Artillery.

Hulbert stared at the tracing admiringly. "You see before you the first release from slavery, Mr. Armes—mass production. Thirty-two perfect portraits in four seconds, and no more laboring with paintbrush and palette. You live in a wonderful age, young man.

You may yet see the day when ships will move without a sail. A man in New York named Fulton has announced he intends to move a square-rigger up the Hudson River with nothing more inside her than a kettle full of steam."

Mistress Sarah rose. "Do you believe that, Daniel—that the winds of Heaven can ever be supplanted by the vapors of boiling water?"

"I believe that men can do anything if they set their minds to it," said Hulbert.

"I'm going out in the garden to sit in the sun, Daniel." Her shadowed blue eyes were adoring as she looked at him. "You're a good man, and a just one, but never tell me again, my love, that women are the ones who live in a dream."

Freshly barbered, Artillery went outside to stand beside the rippling creek and wait for Beth's return. It had been a struggle to keep the overzealous salesman, Sebastian, from blocking, powdering, waving and thoroughly pomading his hair. Even with all his protestations, a glance in the mirror before going outside showed where at the neckline the crafty barber had injected a secret curl.

He was standing on the bank, watching the swirl of a feeding trout, when a quavering voice behind him said, "A day for love, senor. A day made by the sacred saints. You stand by the creek doing nothing, which is fitting, but only a man with great wealth, *Excelencia*, can pass it in such a manner. Others as poor as I am must work every day."

Artillery turned to find the workman who had taken part in the parade the previous afternoon. The old man's toothless mouth showed sunken gums in an ingratiating grin. His face was a map of wrinkles, framed in stringy matted hair. His gnarled, calloused hands with swollen knuckles were clutched tightly on the handle of the spade across his shoulder.

"You're very poetical, old one," Artillery told him, and reached in his pocket for a coin. With the coin in his fingers, he stopped, hesitating under the force of a dawning idea. "Are you seeking work or charity?"

"Either, senor." His deep black eyes were laughing. "I am Pedro, the handyman. Sometimes I work in the planing mill on the edge of the San Sebastian River. Other times I weed the gardens or work in the grove of Senor Hulbert." He eyed Artillery's hand, unmoving in the pocket. "You could persuade me to take charity, senor, since a glass of wine will pass the time if work is not too near."

"Do you dig graves?" Artillery asked him.

"Excellent graves, senor," the old man told him eagerly. "Six feet long, and four feet wide, and six feet deep. But alas, senor, this town is very healthy. I have hopes sometimes for yellow fever, but there's been none, senor, for many a year." He unshouldered his spade and leaned on it heavily. "Did you wish a grave?"

"Yes," said Artillery. "Four."

The old man clucked. "A tragedy, senor, a tragedy. But we have no consecrated ground. Where should these graves be dug, senor?"

"I don't care," Artillery told him, "just so long as they're far apart—preferably one at each corner of the town."

The old man pursed his lips and nodded. "And the bodies, senor?"

"There are no bodies," Artillery told him. "I just want four good graves dug. You take out the dirt, then put it back, then carefully pat it down."

Pedro scratched his matted hair. "But always there are bodies, senor."

"Not today," Artillery told him. "Let us say that the saints have smiled on you, and you have found a man who is charitable. You like to dig graves; I want them dug. What is your price for a grave, Pedro?"

"Two pesos, *Excelencia.*"

"And I'll pay five," said Artillery. "Twenty pesos for four good graves. But mark you, old one—far apart." He gave the old man the coins. "It's to give you work I'm doing this, because I don't believe in charity."

Pedro looked from the money back to Artillery. "You're dueling, senor—*si?*"

"No," said Artillery, "I never duel. Now either give me back my money or pocket it and be gone."

Pedro crossed himself with swiftness and shoved the coins into his ragged pocket. "I'll dig them, senor." He shuffled off a step or two, then turned and said, "Sebastian, the barber, has leeches, *Excelencia.* I advise them the next time that one is affected by a touch of the broiling sun."

He was sitting on the bank, staring reflectively at the water, when Beth found him. He dropped his whimsical musing readily, and went to saddle Black Cloud. If Don Jose wanted to set bravos on Artillery Armes, he must take his chances on having them vanish. Word got about quickly in St. Augustine, and four new graves must soon be known. It would do the cynical captain good to spend some

time with his damned dragoons searching for Lope de Zorrilla underground.

He joined Beth and they rode off slowly together. She took him by the schoolhouse and the treasury and gave him a peek at the governor's botanical gardens, bordering the mansion where he interviewed Reduro. Past the old Franciscan monastery, she turned west.

They were soon idling along the bank of the San Sebastian. Low tide had left a bridle path of hard-packed sand. Caught in the semi-tropical beauty, Beth and Artillery were silent as the horses followed the winding shore. To their left, the river had cut a pattern of winding creeks through its marsh of vivid restful green. Beyond the marsh, the pine trees walled out the world with an endless forest, broken only enough to give a glimpse of the Cuba Redoubt where a guardhouse, housing eight dragoons, protected the western bank of the river. At their right, ash, dwarf oak, and myrtle grew thick in a head-high hedgerow.

The bridle path bore eastward, and suddenly the San Sebastian spread itself to stretch away in endless blue, in imitation of the vastness of the sea. Across the greenness of the marsh, where the river curved back, Artillery could see the houses of the city, and standing above them, the walls of the fort, its towers robbed of their grimness under the sun. Over the housetops rose two of the slender spars of Captain Shanks' swift vessel.

He halted Black Cloud, and Beth moved in beside him, willingly lost in the same magic spell.

"You love it, don't you?" she asked him.

"Sometimes I think I want to leave," he told her, "that I want to see the cities you've seen, and meet the same people, and be able to talk as your father talks, and use poetry as the Spanish use it."

"But you'll never go."

"No, I'll never go," he said. "I could never get close to a city, as I can't get close to a nation. I guess I must feel as the Indians feel—that there is some great spirit which sets you down in a land which brings you food from the earth. You are part of that earth, and when you die, you have to return to it and fertilize it so that other men can go on living. That's part of the debt you have to pay."

"I wonder," she said, "if any man will ever give that much love to a woman."

He turned and saw that her face had paled and that Whitecap's reins were unsteady in her fingers. Then beyond her he saw a boat that was putting in toward shore. There were only two Minorcans

in the tiny boat, but they had swept the sun from the river and brought back the bestial faces of raiders creeping in to kill in the moonlight. Dauna's arms were warm about him. Her lips were his to kiss and kiss again.

"I hope some day you'll find such a woman"—Beth's voice broke —"and that she kills you."

Whitecap reared and was off down the path at the cruel rake of her spur.

"Beth!" he called. "What's the matter?"

She was too far away to answer.

He touched Black Cloud, and in a second had urged her into her swiftest run, but before he had overtaken Whitecap, they were close to the village square. Once he was riding beside her, Beth reined in. She was calm now, stately, her soft lips set politely in a winning smile.

"What was the matter?" Artillery asked her. "I didn't know anything had happened. Why did you run?"

"Whitecap got out of hand," she said primly. "Listen."

A fowling-piece crashed out just ahead of them, to be followed by the rolling of a drum.

"What's that?" he asked her.

"They're shooting at the patgo bird. You love everything that's made of wood. Maybe you can hit it and win yourself a partner for the ball tonight." She touched her spur to the mare again and said over her shoulder, "Come."

12

COLOR STRUCK Artillery full as he and Bethany rode into the square.

He loved color—the green of the woods, the gray of the swamps, the noisy clash of a million flowers in the springtime, the sunshine turning a flock of roseate spoonbills into floating balls of fire. Here in St. Augustine, color was everywhere. The water of the Matanzas glittered. The fruit on the trees was brighter than the golden apples, and the groves were gardens of Hesperides walling in the square.

The darkness of the Spanish girls served to heighten the vividness of shawls and mantillas, gaily dyed red and green. The lighter complexion of American women peeped out from under bonnets of blue and others of straw, tied with ribbons beneath each pretty chin.

Edgings of pink and rose and green, matching the trailing ribbons and pendant sashes, bedecked each full length gown. Dimming it all was the shine of the Spanish morions, the sheen of boots and the effulgence of thirty proud dragoons strutting the smartness of their uniforms.

Backed by the limbs of a live oak tree, perched on the top of its ten-foot pole, sat the patgo bird. Its ribbons fluttered in the aromatic breeze from the river, a strange, unmoving pullet who without any wings had managed to steal a strip of cheerfulness from every girl in the city and bedeck itself in the whole befuddling plumage.

The drum rolled again. A dragoon stepped from the crowd, stood at a line marked in the ground, and fired. The patgo bird sat leeringly as a couple of its ribbons drifted away. Laughter rippled. The other dragoons greeted the efforts of their comrade with a pleasant jeer. The fringe of blacks edging the crowd pressed closer onto the square.

A young man stepped up and took his stance. His cutaway coat was well-tailored and revealed a dozen gold buttons on his black-and-white striped waistcoat. Highly polished black boots came almost to his shapely knees, revealed by his skin-tight pantaloons of gray. He set his beaver hat more firmly and leveled his long-barreled fowling-piece. The drummer went into ecstasies. A shot crashed out. Three more ribbons floated away.

Artillery asked Beth, "Are they trying to knock that thing off the pole?"

"Do you think you could do better?"

He watched another dragoon have a try before he answered. "The only thing they're shattering now," he told her, "is my illusions. Ever since I was born, the Spanish have been after Dan McKetch. Dan always escaped the dragoons unharmed, and I always wondered how he managed to get away."

Lieutenant Sanchez stepped to the line. His efforts were slightly better, for the patgo bird beneath the well-directed charge moved back a few inches and steadied against the heavy trunk of the spreading tree. The under-lieutenant drew a vociferous cheer.

Artillery said, "If they loaded with a heavier charge, used larger shot, and stood back farther, they'd do much better with those fowling-pieces. To knock off a wooden bird such as that, they're standing too near."

"You're not very polite," Beth told him. "I don't believe you can knock it off with a single shot." She was smiling mockingly. "Then at least there's one Spaniard who knows your tactics. Don Jose's

going to shoot, and the crowd's moving back. I wonder, if he wins, if he'll ask me to lead the ball with him tonight. He doesn't seem to be standing too near."

Artillery looked blackly at the captain of dragoons. Don Jose's uniform was brighter than any of the others, its whiteness unmarred, its buttons and trappings more blinding in the high-noon sun. The officer raised his long fowling-piece and sighted with care, then lowered the gun and took a powder horn from a waiting aide. Artillery judged the depth of the charge. The crowd fell silent, watching the heavy buckshot trickle into the muzzle from the captain's palm.

Artillery was looking still farther toward nightfall. He could hear the music, see the flare of torches, picture Bethany's graceful figure stepping out in front with Reduro to lead the grand march at the patgo ball.

He turned away and estimated the distance from himself to the gaily beribboned fowl. He could end the match right now if he had his rifle, but his saddleboot was empty. His rifle was at the Hulbert house, standing in the corner by his guitar. He could hit the bird with a pistol, but would it knock it off? He shook his head unconsciously. Several charges of birdshot had already failed to unseat the hardy target. The pistol load was far too light for such a distance.

A "*viva*" came from the watchers as Don Jose shoved his ramrod home and gave a bow to indicate that nothing could stand against such a charge and such a hail of ball.

Artillery threw his tomahawk as the drum began to roll.

Don Jose stepped forward a pace and raised his burnished fowling-piece. The crowd turned heads on pivots. The drummer stopped drumming. Don Jose lowered his fowling-piece and stared at the tree, his aquiline face contorted in a scowl. The golden-hafted tomahawk was stuck in the tree beneath the branches. Two beribboned pieces of wood lay on the ground below it, all that was left of the gaudy patgo bird.

"Have we Indians here?" shouted Don Jose. "The bird's been split with a tomahawk! *¡Conducta falsa y perfida!* Foul play! Foul play!"

The contestants began to mutter, and the mutter crept through the square with ominous swiftness. Only a crowd with the blood of Spain could change so quickly to trouble from the business of being gay.

Bethany began to laugh. She gave Whitecap a touch of the crop and, scattering people before her, cantered out to the live oak tree.

She halted there in the center of the square. Reaching up above her, she pulled the tomahawk free.

"I challenged the senor to throw," she said, and held the tomahawk high. "If you must be angry, Captain Reduro, pray be angry with me."

The muttering stilled. The Spaniards loved one thing better than trouble—the sight of a smiling senorita and a chance to display in its happiest form their Spanish gallantry.

"This is the first patgo ever held here," Bethany went on quickly. "I thought that the bird had but to be knocked from the pole."

"It was knocked," said a voice, "and handily."

"That's why I dared Senor Armes," Beth continued. "I did not know he had no gun. He threw his tomahawk, senors, not to be unfair to Don Jose or any of you, but because he knew his own great skill, and knew how much I wanted him to lead the patgo ball with me."

"*Viva!*" shouted Under-Lieutenant Sanchez. "*Viva* Senor Armes! I would have turned the cannon of the Castillo loose on the bird, senorita, if I thought in your heart you held such an honor for me."

"*Viva!*" shouted Don Jose, and held up his hand. "*Hombres,* had I known it was Senor Artillery Armes who split this bird, you would have heard no word of unfair play. We love each other like brothers. Is that not true, senor?"

"Like brothers," said Artillery.

"It will always be thus," said Don Jose. "Wherever he goes in the province, my love for him will remain so great that I feel in my heart I must track him down some day." He clicked his heels and bowed toward Beth. "And now, *amigos,* three long cheers for his Indian victory. This will be the biggest patgo ever held, greater than any posy ball. Twenty kegs will be broached tonight—ten of wine, and ten of rum—and two beefs roasted, to be shared alike by black and white. There will be cakes and sweets for the children, favors for the ladies."

"*Viva, viva!*" yelled the crowd.

"Come one, come all," said Reduro. "Twenty musicians will make the music, and Governor White and his good lady have agreed to open the ball."

"*Viva, viva!*" yelled the crowd.

"Come one, come all," said Reduro again. "Never has St. Augus-

tine known such a ball. We dance till daylight, senors and senoritas. Come one, come all, for this is a night that St. Augustine is gay."

Artillery was silent as he and Beth followed the road along Maria Sanchez Creek toward her home.

"Now you think me still more forward than ever," she said after a time.

"I do not. I'm thinking how lucky I am. A single day in St. Augustine, and I've captured the prettiest girl in the province to go with me as queen of the ball."

"The force of arms," said Beth.

"Yes," he agreed rather gravely. "I'm beginning to learn many things—that gentleness doesn't mean very much, or even fair play. The prize goes to him who wins by any means. I should have learned that years ago watching the Indians playing *tokonhay*."

"What's that?" Beth asked.

He told her about the game and General Bowles, who had missed becoming King of Florida because Kinhaizee's warriors had been tricked of their muskets. She listened with excitement deepening the blue of her eyes.

"I'm not afraid of Indians," she boasted. "Of course, the only ones I've ever seen have been poor, ragged creatures wandering about St. Augustine. Cheti Haiola and his braves sound wonderful. Some day I'd like to see them. Is there any difference between a Creek and a Seminole?"

"They're the same," Artillery told her. "'Seminole' means wanderer. It was given to bands of Negro slaves who escaped from the Spanish and wandered through the forests long before it was applied to the Indians. Then it was taken by the tribes who broke away from the great Creek nation and wandered south from Georgia into Florida."

"Maybe I'm really a Seminole," she told him. "I'd like to break away from the cities I've known and help build something that I felt was just my own—a house by a river in a forest where no one has ever set foot before. If there was a man who loved me, we could rear a family, and my children would learn to live from the soil. They'd grow up free from the petty intrigue and politics which my father has known."

"Doctor Zeke told me once," said Artillery, "that dreams were really deeds, Beth, and that if anyone dreamed long enough and hard enough, and kept a heart that was pure and strong, the dreams were sure to come true."

"He must have been a very good man," said Beth. "Do you think he was right—about the dreams, I mean?"

Artillery said, "I never knew him to be wrong. He was not only good; he was very wise, and as in most things, when he talked about dreams he had a little more to say."

"Tell me."

"He said that if you wish your dreams to come true, you should carry three pistols instead of two; that a man with fist against a man with a knife had nothing; that a man with a knife against a man with a pistol had nothing; that a man with a pistol against a man with a rifle fought always too far away; and that a man with a rifle who couldn't hit his enemy had better learn to run or he'd be dead before he had a chance to pray."

"And what about the tomahawk?" Beth asked him.

"That's strange you should ask that," Artillery told her. "The Indians taught me to use it until I grew better than they, but Doctor Zeke would never help me with it nor praise my skill. When I asked him why, he said it was cursed, for it had brought me to love the ones who had taught me to use it. He said that was bad, for sometime I'd raise it against them and they and my heart would die together."

They were nearing the house, and Beth slowed. "Did he mean Hasse Micco?"

"Perhaps," said Artillery. "Or Cheti Haiola, or any of the braves in the village. I have a plume in my saddlebag that Cheti Haiola said would always protect me in battle, for no Indian in the whole Creek nation would ever fire upon its wearer. He said that the Indians would realize I fought against them only because I was white and had to fight with my people."

"Do you think you'll ever wear it?"

"Only with this," said Artillery. He reached in his pocket and took out the ribbon she had given him the night before. "And then it would be to protect the donor of this trophy for the horse s mane. On two counts, Bethany, I think I'd rather die right now than ever live to see that day."

"You're very sweet," she told him tenderly. "I hope you'll never have to fight your friends. I don't think you will either. Look how you won over Don Jose."

"How I won him over?" Artillery regarded her with a twinkle. "Sometimes, Beth, my own effectiveness startles me. I'm afraid the brave captain turned a little too quickly to leave me quite comfortable."

"You forget he's Spanish." Beth laughed as they rode into the grove and stopped at the stables. "Spaniards always have an awful lot to say."

After lunch, the Hulberts insisted that Artillery play and sing. He gave them an hour until Mrs. Hulbert retired for her daily siesta. Beth went off on an errand.

Hulbert seated himself with Artillery in the garden, filled his pipe, and began abruptly. "Look, young man, do you like St. Augustine?"

"Very much, sir, from what I've seen."

"It's not my province to pry," said Hulbert, "but Shanks was here this morning to collect for his seeds and clippings, and his tongue's as loose as a hound-dog's bowels. Word's about that you have some money left you by your parents."

"A little, sir," said Artillery. "Five hundred Spanish doubloons."

"A little? Why, damn my soul—" Hulbert lowered his voice and glanced at his wife's open window. "That's eight thousand hard American dollars! Or a thousand head of cattle with land and graziers to feed them; or a piece of a sawmill with blacks to work it; or a grove and a house and a canemill right here in the town!"

"I've thought of those things," said Artillery.

"Oh, you have?" said Hulbert. "Well, it's far from being my business, young man, but you're a passable sort of a fellow. You speak without your thumbs in your mouth and have a bit of awe for your elders. Nor do you loiter around a living room with your sitting-breeches on."

"Thank you, sir," said Artillery.

"Beelzebub's breath, lad, don't thank me! You strike me as one in need of fathering. Beth's been enough for a man alone to handle, and she's grown too big to have her bottom paddled, though I've seen the day I've heated it good and warm. Still, it's seen with half an eye she likes you, and I'm not above the venturesomeness of taking another problem on. What I'm getting at, sir, is this: Why don't you make your home right here in St. Augustine, let me invest your money for you in something worthwhile, and settle down?"

"I've given some thought to mulberry trees and silkworms, sir."

"Indeed, sir. So have others I've heard." Hulbert squinted his eyes away from the sun.

"The only thing is," Artillery continued, "if I decided to set out mulberry trees, I'd like to have a place of my own, preferably somewhere along the St. Johns River. I'm afraid, Mr. Hulbert, that nothing could ever keep me in a town."

Hulbert turned back slowly. "Has Beth been talking?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Well, I know what I mean," said Hulbert. "I've got such a place—fifty acres a few miles south of Fort Picolata. If I didn't think we'd be scalped there in our beds, I'd have settled there myself instead of in this mangy town. We'll discuss this later, but keep it in mind, Mr. Armes. I can probably do well for you on mulberry trees shipped in from abroad, and as for the land and a place to build, it can be had within reason for one I like. Fort Picolata is near enough to offer protection from Indians, and as for the land, none better is to be found."

"There's just one thing," said Artillery. "I have to buy a slave girl."

Hulbert, half risen, slowly settled down. "A slave girl? Bless my soul, sir, there are wenches enough to be found in the taverns. You have no house to be served or babies to be nursed that I know of. Must you bed yourself so regularly that you have to get a private doxy to carry around?"

"She belongs to John Houston McIntosh, sir, and was teacher to his daughter, Mary." He told about Dauna's capture and the four other slaves to be sold at auction the following Monday, vainly trying to eliminate the personal exultation that insisted on creeping in. As he talked, he could feel Daniel Hulbert hardening.

"Your heart does you credit, but not your head," said Hulbert when the story was finished. "Along with Jefferson, Mr. Armes, I'm a man who thinks little of slavery, and less of those who use humans as a commodity for traffic."

Artillery stood up stonily. "This is an errand of manumission, sir. Mr. McIntosh intended to free this girl."

"So?" said Hulbert, his eyes grown disbelieving. "And your thoughts do not extend to the four black men who were also McIntosh's slaves? Else why not also bid them in."

"Because he didn't intend to free them, sir, and Dauna is more than just a slave. I knew her among the Indians, played with her there, and raced against her when I was twelve years old. She's delicate, sir, and educated. They call her Dauna, the Light One, because she's almost white of skin. She was reared with others of the McIntosh family. You may think what you like, Mr. Hulbert. I intend to return her to Mr. McIntosh so she can be legally manumitted."

"She may cost you a thousand dollars." Hulbert stuck out his underlip and flecked it with a finger.

"I'm prepared to go eight," said Artillery. "That's all I have."

"You'll get no such sum from McIntosh," Hulbert told him. "I know better than you the canniness of my distant kin."

"I want nothing, sir, but to see her free."

Hulbert shook his head and rose from his chair. "Damn it, young man, I see why Quentin chose you. I was young myself once, but, thank the good Lord, never quite as crazy. I believe I've misjudged you." He held out his hand.

Artillery shook it. "Thank you, sir."

"Keep your lips tight closed to my wife and daughter," Hulbert said softly. "It's time enough when that auction comes to let the trouble begin."

Artillery forgot his predicament when Beth returned, for the household was plunged into preparations for the patgo ball and guests who were coming for tea. Gigs began to arrive late in the afternoon with shining Spanish officers, proud officials with their senoras and senoritas, stately in ceremonial mantilla and comb. Artillery moved away quickly as he saw the two girls in whose house he had danced the night before.

Hulbert presented Artillery to them all, Spanish and American, but Artillery's eyes were for Beth alone. She was in a simple gown of white, with puffed short sleeves which left her slender arms bare. Delicate green leaves on a tiny trellis of gold embroidered the hem at her ankles. In front of the narrow waistline was an intricate bow, and around her neck a collar of ruching, both of the same emerald green. Her ballet slippers of soft white satin were tied on with crisscrossed ribbons which made her dainty ankles look still more trim.

Due to Mistress Sarah, word was soon about among the ladies that Beth's dress had just arrived that day via Captain Shanks, and was a genuine Paris gown. Beth was forced to don a matching bonnet of soft pink silk and lined with the same emerald green. Artillery knew instantly that no lovelier girl had walked the earth when the bow was tied under her chin.

Beth, gracious and laughing with everyone, moved through the crowd while her mother poured. Artillery found himself in a corner, balancing a teacup not too adroitly and taking refuge from the chattering with gentle Father Michael O'Reilly, the *vicario* of St. Augustine.

It was easy to see why the priest was loved, for in his heart he carried part of the troubles and joys of everyone in the town. He passed some on to Artillery as couples drifted by. This man served

the best coffee in his house after Mass on Sunday. That one, Alvarez, presented the bells to the cathedral, and lived in the oldest house in town. That couple in the corner had lost three children in a month of the fever. The little girl clinging to her mother's hand was Josepha Papy, the first girl to be christened in the cathedral. She had danced for Governor White, and wouldn't walk downstairs, but always slid down the bannisters.

The tall, graceful Spaniard in shimmering blue owned the sawmill. His wife, very ill some months before, had died when an Indian raid had been rumored through the province and all the people for miles about had fled into St. Augustine.

In ten short minutes of the Father's genial trivia, Artillery felt much closer to the people around him. Such a man as Father O'Reilly must be very good and very holy, for he brought to life the soul and spirit of the Spanish village.

A horse rode up while the Father was talking, and Lieutenant Sanchez bustled in, mopping perspiration from the rim of his morion. "A thousand pardons for my lateness, senora." He bent over Mistress Sarah's hand. "And I bring the regrets of *Excelencia* Captain Reduro. There has been a little trouble today."

"Trouble, Under-Lieutenant?" asked Daniel Hulbert.

"*Si,* senor." A silence fell, and conscious that he had caught attention, Sanchez straightened importantly and faced the room. "A citizen has disappeared—a friend of Captain Reduro's—Lope de Zorrilla."

"The saints are good," murmured Father O'Reilly piously. "We'll all of us live in a better place if El Tarantula is never found."

"That's not all, Father," the lieutenant went on. "There's a mystery about it. Some strange hand has been digging empty graves. We found two already, and I and six of my men, under orders of Captain Reduro, have been forced to undig them—only to find nothing in them. We've had little time to prepare for the ball, since no sooner had we finished with one fresh grave than another was discovered a mile away on the hottest bank of the San Sebastian River."

Hulbert's quick glance flashed toward Artillery. "My sympathy, Under-Lieutenant Sanchez. A heavy dot of rum in your tea will cool you from your labors."

In the distance, a drum began to roll. A murmur came from the soldiers present. "Hark," said one, "perhaps they've found him."

"No," said Hulbert. "That's Captain Shanks' *Blue Dolphin* putting out to sea."

"Some time ago," said Father O'Reilly mildly, "this El Tarantula had some trouble with one of the *Blue Dolphin's* crew. With no offense to anyone present, the American seamen are hot of temper. Perhaps if you keep on digging, my son—"

"It might be," said Hulbert, "these graves were a ruse, since you found them empty. Ephraim Shanks is a crafty man. I fear, no matter how deep you dig, that nothing will be found."

"I'll pass your thought to Captain Reduro," said Sanchez. "He respects you, sir. Perhaps you can tell him it is not the duty of the First Dragoons of Cuba to spend four hours in the heat at tilling unplanted ground."

Conversation started to buzz, and Artillery was glad that the party broke up early in preparation for the ball.

Yet, in after years, only incidents remained quite clear. Like the fight with Drummond, he found the picture had turned to a dream and he never could quite remember it all. The governor and his lady were clear, and Don Jose de Reduro, welcoming everyone and urging more food and drink on one and all. His walk along the sea wall with Beth and the moment he took her in his arms to swear that he loved her were always startlingly clear.

His arrival home as day was dawning to be greeted on the porch by Don Jose and an honor squad of six dragoons was perhaps the clearest of all. Beth clung to his arm in an instant of terror, but there was nothing but friendliness and good fellowship in the bow of Don Jose.

"Senor," he said, "a thousand thanks from the governor and his lady, and the brave dragoons, from the happy senoritas and their happier beaux. A million thanks, good senor, from the blacks who have feasted, and everyone in St. Augustine, including your humble servant, Don Jose."

"What falderal is this, *Excelencia*?" Beth asked sharply.

Artillery was speechless. He was very weary, and once again felt it might be wrong to marry wine and rum.

"Falderal, senorita? You humble me." Reduro came to attention, full on his dignity. "You have been Queen of the Patgo through the dauntless skill of Senor Armes, and never did more beautiful lead a ball. There is a custom, senorita."

He reached inside his tunic and produced a lengthy scroll. "I have on hand an accurate accounting cast by myself and two of my aides—a trifle for a man as valiant as Senor Armes—a mere two hundred and ninety pesos to cover food and wine and music." He held it out to Artillery, who stared for a moment unblinkingly.

"The custom is, senor," Reduro said gaily, "that he who knocks the beribboned bird from the patgo pole not only wins the queen of the ball; he also wins the privilege to pay."

13

AN UNTIMELY HEAT had come crawling up northward, flattening the water of the ocean and blotting out the blue of the sky above St. Augustine with an inverted cup of gray. Nothing moved. The trees hung limp. The oranges looked juiceless, and turned from gold to brown. Only a breeze could move away the oppressive mass, but no breeze would come. There would be no rain. The colors of St. Augustine had changed forever to black and white, and would stay that way, never to shine again.

It was Auction Day. Tempers were short. The square around the small rudely-covered quadrangle of the market was filled with men. There were no mantillas, not a single merry dot of a bonnet to break the unpleasant somberness. Black and white, Africa and America, clashing in the marketplace and unwillingly merging to blot out mockingly any bright hue that might indicate a trace of humanity.

The auctioneer was short and fat, amiable and witty, with pudgy hands that fluttered when he talked. His hair was curled in greasy ringlets. He carried a thin and flexible cane, which he swished through the air to prove a point, and a heavy pistol sagged his waistline. He wore a suit of spotless drill, and ruffles of the whitest lace bedecked his paunchy stomach. The whiteness of his suit looked gray.

Black Cloud stood with her head hung listlessly while the auctioneer sold vegetables, some venison, kegs of rum, and St. Lucar wine.

Bidding was slow, and the auctioneer jested. "Senors, senors—surely you haven't come here just to trifle. I have food and wine to dispose of. If you do not buy, my time is wasted. Surely food was what brought you here today."

The crowd moved restlessly and muttered. A drum rolled out. A Negro crier announced the sale of a dozen casks of a different wine.

Following the course of the bidding, Artillery thought of the two hundred and ninety pesos which he had paid for the patgo.

It might have bought up all the food to be sold in the auction that day.

"Twenty pesos. Twenty-five. Thirty. Cheap wine, senors, very cheap. Thirty-five pesos. Thirty-seven. Forty. Sold to the generous Senor Martinez, who feeds his family so well. You will call for them later, senor?"

"Si."

The auctioneer turned to two blacks who were helping him, and waved his cane. The casks were removed to be stacked at the side of the platform.

It would never end. The heat would grow greater till no one could breathe. Tempers would grow shorter, and prices lower. The drums would grow louder, and roll uninterruptedly all day. Artillery found himself muttering one of John Scott's poems:

"I hate the drum's discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round;
To me it talks of ravaged plains,
And burning towns, and ruined swains,
And mangled limbs, and dying groans,
And widows' tears, and orphans' moans,
And all that Misery's hand bestows
To fill the catalogue of human woes."

He wished he might forget it. He wanted to forget other things: rides with Beth in the moonlight; her lips so warm against his own; her plans for their house on the river; Mistress Sarah's tearful welcome to him as a new-found son. He must be thoroughly rotten inside to love two women and not really know which one he wanted. Some evil streak, unrecognized inside him, must have made him ask Beth's hand in marriage.

He wanted to forget Daniel Hulbert, staring silently. Hulbert knew, although Artillery had told him nothing. Hulbert was almost as wise as Doctor Zeke. He could look way down in back of your eyes and into your soul, and know how much you intended to hurt his daughter, know that you intended to buy in Dauna and, without so much as a last goodbye, place her *en croupe* behind you and ride away.

His mind was befouled with the poem, going round and round and round. His heart was besmirched with unfaithfulness to the only two women who owned his love.

"Oh God—" he began, "oh Merciful God—" and finished, "Damn

the drums! Damn them into eternity! Damn this difference of black and white! It's killed my soul, and I cannot pray."

"Regard your posters, senors. You've seen the news on Government House. Four strong bucks, well-broken and docile, to work your fields." The thin stick swished in the auctioneer's hand. His persuasive voice was full of joy. "And one juicy wench, with skin near white—not so docile, senors—but full of promise." He smacked his lips. "Oh, full of promise! These will go on sale immediately after these last six crates of new-laid eggs. Beautiful eggs, senors—fresh from the hens. It must be the eggs that brought you here today."

The drums rolled out. The Negro crier intoned his song.

"Assuredly, the eggs, Senor Armes."

Artillery turned, and found he was standing beside the smiling Don Jose.

"Son of a sow," Artillery said wearily. "Your presence makes a cesspool of St. Augustine."

"The time will come," said Reduro, "when your insults will cease to amuse me and your gold will be gone."

"By that time," said Artillery, "this will be a United States city, and you won't find it necessary to hire assassins to kill me, since you fear to do it on your own."

Reduro gazed at him sharply. "Again you speak with hidden meanings. Once more I warn you, Senor Armes. Your macabre jokes are irking me. I want you to know that somehow or other you've murdered an innocent man. I can dig up fifty graves if you make them. His body will be found, and I'll see that you're hanged if it's necessary to leave pockmarks on every inch of the town."

"Bravo," said Artillery. "You frighten me, Captain Reduro, into leaving here today. Meantime, I suppress a desire to tweak your nose and pull out a tuft of your scraggly beard. But it takes too long to insult you. I'd be far away before your seconds got around."

The drums broke in. The slaves had been brought up quietly, and waited on the other side of the market, standing in a spiritless line on the sandy ground.

The girl was Dauna. She stood straight and tall and more alluring than ever, but he had built an illusion, thinking long of her image as something so strong it could never be touched by life or trouble. Watching her fingers clasping and unclasping and the motionless stare of her downcast eyes, he realized she was different. Hurt was there in every line—not physical, but a bruise of the soul. She had been a slave, but never till now a part of slavery. She had

known only kindliness, the comforts of a master's house where the whip was a jest and the chains a matter for laughing. The things she had seen in a few short months were stamped in her whole demeanor.

He wondered if the mettle and pluck he loved so much had been hardened by the jeers of the raiders into brooding malice. He was sensitive enough to find her still the selfsame girl, inviolable, but his sensitiveness told him that the elfin child who had grinned from behind the trees at his awkward boyish efforts and the mocking girl who had laughed at his embarrassment were totally and forever gone.

"One buck Negro," said the auctioneer, and beckoned to a shivering little man of lightish brown. The slave climbed up on the platform. Ragged breeches hung to his knees, and his torso was bare. "Puny thing," said the auctioneer, "but only the parts you can see, *amigos.* He's already sired seventy bucks and thirty growing wenches, and he's at the peak of his powers today, just turned twenty-nine. His necessary muscles are just like leather."

"A hundred pesos," cried someone.

The auctioneer rolled up his eyes to heaven. "A hundred pesos, the senor says. A hundred pesos for a stallion who can breed all night and pick cotton in the fields all day."

"A hundred and fifty," cried a voice.

"A hundred and fifty," the auctioneer repeated. "Turn around, *hombre.*" He swished his cane. "Docile, dutiful, and the sire of thirty light chocolate wenches who are growing up more beautiful than that one there." His cane pointed out toward Dauna. "I'll take no bid below three hundred, *amigos.* This buck is worth it. Three hundred pesos for him, to go to the Spanish crown."

"Two seventy-five," said a pale-faced man with a creaking voice. Artillery looked and saw that half of the bidder's receding chin was bunched in a knot, disfigured by a hideous scar.

"Three hundred," the auctioneer repeated. "Three hundred. Three hundred. Three hundred."

"Two seventy-five," the scarred-faced one repeated. "It's all you'll get, senor *sabastador,* and all I'll pay."

"Sold!" The thin cane swished across the trembling Negro's buttocks. "Sold to Senor Oberon, representative of *Excelencia* Zephania Kingsley. He's all yours, Senor Oberon. Hurry and take him away."

Black and white. Three more bucks, judged on their bodies only, weighed in price for their muscles and sinews and their pro-

creative organs which a man might decently think were not for sale, but a part of his life which was all his own. One hundred. Two hundred. Three hundred. And another was gone.

Was it entirely black and white? Artillery began to wonder. There was red blood in it, too—Hasse Micco's mother; Hasse Micco himself. There were pure-blooded Indians for a hundred years back, raided and sold by Spain. There had been yellow men, too, and white, serfs and vassals, Christians, standing naked and shivering as the little brown man had shivered. That was two thousand years before in the marts of Rome.

Nothing had changed. The swish was the same that the Romans had heard when the *sabastador* swung his cane. It would be the same for years to come so long as gold meant more than the lives of people. It would be the same in Florida whether the flag above her was that of the United States or Spain.

Dauna was on the platform. The green silk handkerchief was gone, and her dress was ragged and dirty. Artillery worked his way up close to the edge, moving without his own volition. He watched the auctioneer extolling her eyes, her hair, her teeth, her body, stripping her naked without revealing, choosing the nicest of Spanish words guaranteed to set the bidders aflame.

"What promise, senors! What beauty! The speaker of Spanish and English, who can read and write. Dauna." He rolled it. "Dauna, senors—a virgin—and look."

She had folded her arms across her breast. He made her drop them by flicking her wrists with the tip of his swishing cane. Her tattered gown was nearly falling, revealing the fullness of depths and shadows.

"Fifty doubloons," said Artillery.

The auctioneer stopped his patter and walked to the edge of the platform. The tenseness of the watching men tightened and grew, and burst itself in a rippling sigh.

"Did you say fifty pesos, senor? Do you hope to start the bidding with fifty pesos for a wench of beauty such as this—educated, virgin, and a light Maroon?"

"Use the tip of your cane to dig out your ears, *sabastador*." Artillery's voice was loud enough for the crowd to hear. "If you lay it on that girl again you'll be digging a knife from your belly. My bid was eight hundred pesos, which I'm prepared to pay with fifty golden doubloons."

The fat *sabastador* backed away, his genial smile forgotten. "I'm not used to being threatened, senor. This is an orderly sale."

The pallid Senor Oberon stepped forward, fingering the scar on his chin. "You have the bid, *sabastador*—eight hundred pesos. It might be wise to strip this wench. Is she set with Brista Carte diamonds which we cannot see?"

"I'm bidding for her as she stands—clothed," said Artillery.

"The market's gone up in virgin Maroons," said Oberon. "I'll bid a thousand to have her stripped. I cannot buy a pig in a poke for Senor Kingsley."

"A hundred doubloons as she stands right now," said Artillery.

"Sixteen hundred pesos, senor?" The auctioneer was sweating. The drums rolled out. "Sixteen hundred pesos!" he yelled above them. The drums grew louder. "Sixteen hundred!" His scream was futile against them, and he silenced them with a lifted hand. "Sixteen hundred once, senors!"

Reduro stepped up and whispered to Oberon.

"Two thousand," said the pallid man. "The senor with the yellow hair has convinced me with his ardor that there must be something about this wench which there is to see. Strip her now, *sabastador,* and deliver her to me."

"Two hundred doubloons," said Artillery, "and keep your hands away from her."

Dauna stood as something dead, her hands limp beside her, her eyes cast down, not seeming to hear or see.

Oberon looked at Reduro, and the captain nodded.

"I'll top that thirty-two hundred with three hundred pesos more." Oberon tried to shout, but his creaky voice broke. "There's something about the ardor of this young man with the yellow hair which makes me think this wench may be a prize for Senor Kingsley."

A greater oppressiveness settled on the steaming square. Artillery felt he was breaking. Dauna must never face such suffering a second time. Light saddlebags would be easier to carry, and his heart would weigh less inside him once he knew she was free. He could stand no more of the bidding, no more of Reduro's obvious plan of egging Oberon on.

"Four hundred doubloons, *sabastador.*"

The auctioneer moved his heavy lips, but no sound came forth. The drums began a gentle roll, not too loud to blanket the bidding, but enough to shatter cracking nerves with their dull monotony.

"Six thousand four hundred pesos, senors!" The auctioneer's voice had ceased to be mellow and creaked as badly as Oberon's. "Six thousand four hundred pesos once. Do I hear any more?"

"You hear no more," said Oberon. "Senor Kingsley is a business-

man. I trust this young man with the yellow hair has the gold to pay you for this piece of sheer insanity."

"Six thousand four hundred pesos twice. Three times, senors. Going. Going. Gone."

Artillery reached his hand to Dauna and said, "Come along with me."

"A moment, senor." The auctioneer held up his cane. "A matter of payment and papers."

"*Si.*" Artillery took the saddlebags from Black Cloud and dumped two piles at the auctioneer's feet. He wished for an instant the sun was out so that the light might catch them and bring them to life, for they oddly had the look of Bethany's hair.

The auctioneer bent pantingly and counted. The drums still trilled in a monotone. The crowd stood choked, watching the play of the auctioneer's fingers, for so much gold in a single spot had scarce been seen in a lifetime by anyone there. When the gold was found right, the auctioneer took a parchment and scribbled some words with a long blue quill. Artillery took the bill of sale, and Dauna stepped down.

He had spent four-fifths of his legacy, but he owned a woman. He had the right to bed her, board her, breed her, and beat her, and none could gainsay him. He had the right to work her, starve her, love her, hate her, or kill her.

The auctioneer stacked the doubloons on a table, and under the haze of the sky they looked bloody. Artillery wondered how many lives they had bought and sold since the day they were minted. They had bought a life now, so stated on the parchment, and the parchment spoke both for God and King, for it bore the seal of the Spanish crown.

The drumming stopped. The Negro crier intoned that the sale was over.

A gun boomed out on Anastasia Island, and St. Augustine waited. In a minute came the second gun announcing a vessel. Another drum purled on the high Castillo's wall. The auction was forgotten as the sheeplike crowd moved off to see the ship come in.

Bethany stood confronting him. Her riding habit was white today, and the whiteness made it a mockery, as though the clothes revealed the radiant whiteness of her body, and that such a body had been sent by God to announce that the absence of pigment was the only thing that mattered, and that fairness of skin meant purity and that "blessed are the pure in heart" meant a heart that's

white, and destined forever to rule the world, be master of every man and maid, and beast and bird, and fish and flower which dared to be born with color.

Looking at Beth, he felt that Dauna was black and himself begrimed, and Black Cloud unclean, and that somehow the very white purity of her presence must draw out the sun and stop all wrong and dissipate the overhanging pall.

"Beth." The word he uttered might have come from Oberon.

She stared at Dauna, estimating the tattered frock and downcast eyes, the slender bare feet and ankles, stripping her as the auctioneer had failed to do.

"Is she worth six thousand dollars—the house we hoped to have on the river, the trees and the silkworms, our children?"

"Beth—you were here?"

"Did you think I'd miss the auction? I stood on the edge of the crowd and heard it all. Is she worth six thousand dollars—the things I've mentioned?"

"She's the daughter of Cheti Haiola," Artillery told her, "as I am his son. She belongs to the woods and the forests, and not to me nor the Georgia planters, nor anyone."

"She's a black and a slave," said Bethany. "Blacks are slaves because they're beasts, and beasts are slaves because Heaven put them exactly where they belong. I asked you a question. Is she worth it? Do you intend to answer?"

"Yes," said Artillery, "I'll answer. If that's the way you feel, Beth, she's worth it all."

"Then bed her well, and breed more slaves, since that's why you bought her," said Bethany. "She'll give you pleasure that's worth your gold and keep your madness flaming, I'm sure. She's built that way, Artillery, as most beasts are."

She raised her crop and slashed him hard across the face, then turned and walked toward Whitecap and mounted, to merge with the milk-white mare.

Artillery touched the livid mark along his cheek, as Oberon had fingered his own ugly scar.

"Dauna." His whisper was pleading.

"Yes, master."

"If you call me 'master,' I'll kill you."

"What difference?" she said in a leaden voice. "It's your privilege, master. You forget you own me now."

She mounted quickly to Black Cloud's rump without his help,

forcing him by her position to get awkwardly into the saddle. Her arm went around him, pressing him close, but it was only protection from falling.

"I really may kill you if you don't try to help me," he told her as he turned the mare.

"As I said, it's your privilege, master." Her voice was no warmer. "I'll come at your call."

"God damn you!" he said. "You are a beast!"

He kicked his heels into Black Cloud's side and headed fast for the city gates. A dizziness had seized him, a lumping of the skin like the first quick warning of a coming chill. He was full of unreality, and a great despair, such as might have beset a drowning man for the third time going down.

14

THE WOODS WERE dry, a long time without rain, and the fires set by the graziers burned briskly, traveling along through palmettoes and underbrush until checked by some barren spot or the barrier of river or stream. The graziers cared for nothing but their cattle, considering the lands of Florida their own through the rights of time. It made no difference that their fires, propelled into wrath by an unexpected coastal wind, might occasionally flare into holocausts, devastating whole forests of pine or some helpless settler's home.

Blackened land, fire-consumed colonies of nestlings, deer and small mammals, driven from their lairs to die, meant nothing. Ruined lumber and naval stores were merely the property of others, and nothing out of the cattle owner's pocket. Let the hunters yell. The less game there was the higher the price the scraggly humped-back steers would bring. Nothing mattered, except that in spring over blackened land the forage of grass grew cheap and green.

Noxious smoke blanketed the King's Road as Artillery rode out of St. Augustine. It was thicker and more baneful than the glowering sky, and made the world more gray. It trailed him into the tunnel of Twelve Mile Swamp, shutting him in perniciously until his nose and eyes were smarting.

Ten yards out of St. Augustine, he had completely lost sight of Castillo and bay. Now in the swamp, with Black Cloud's head continually tossing in alarm, he was losing sight of all perspective.

Dauna was just a clinging weight with an arm about him, hampering his progress. Black Cloud was an irritation. The smoke was part of a sky dropped down to choke him.

When he left the swamp, there was little change. Dusk had come, but hours before he had lost the world in the light of day. He pushed on automatically. Through an afternoon of silence he tried to garner the courage to speak, but Dauna's remoteness kept him mute. He hoped she would tell him that she understood, voice one tiny word of thanks. It would be so different if, once escaped, her verve returned, she laughed again, and taunted him. He had spent his fortune for unquenchable love, for understanding, loyalty and devotion from a woman he might cherish. Instead, he had purchased utter disdain, cased in a lump of indurated clay.

First he feared she had been mistreated, broken by the handling and lust of barbarous slavers, but he knew that McIntosh's overseer had spoken the truth. The slavers' very ruthlessness must have saved her. Their thoughts were for money. Wantons were cheap, girls such as Dauna worth too much to be depreciated. Only at last did he blame himself and Bethany and the events of the morning.

"Dauna—" He moistened his lips, cracked and begrimed from the smokiness.

"Yes, master."

It was hopeless, impossible to ride with her in silence; equally trying to know what to say. He wanted to tell her that his loyalty to her had never wavered, and also tell her of Bethany. He must explain about Reduro and why he had not dared to try to find her although he knew she was in St. Augustine.

He tried again. "I bought you to free you."

"You're generous, master."

He shut his lips. He hoped that God would strike her dead. He hated her. He despised her. She was dumb and black and a slave girl. She was a parrot, speaking rote with no brain. She was worse than Angela. Angela at least had feelings and passion. When she wanted love, she could fight for it and not be a clod, even though in the end she might betray. He wished he were like Geronimo—Geronimo knew how to handle slaves—and Oberon, cold as a frosted saber. He wished he had let Oberon buy her, take her to Kingsley to be sold in Georgia or across the seas in Tripoli.

His head was swimming. It was dark enough now to see the fires creeping along the stunted growth for miles around between the King's Road and the sea. He turned off left, consumed by an

almost unbearable fatigue. The pines were a little thinner and somewhere he might find a place to camp for the night. Black Cloud quickened her pace when her nostrils turned from the smarting smoke.

In an hour's ride, they reached a pond, the minutest of circles edged with pads. He knew unless a strong wind came the fire could never jump the road. The air was clearer about the pond. All in all, it impressed him as a likely place to stay.

He halted Black Cloud, and said, "Get down."

Since he had a slave, he intended to use her. She wanted to work; then let her work. For a single evening of service, six thousand four hundred dollars was a steeper price than he had paid for Reduro's patgo.

She watched as he dismounted, unsaddled, and let Black Cloud drink from the edge of the pond.

Artillery turned and handed her his tomahawk. "Cut wood," he told her, "and fix some tea. You've insisted on calling me 'master.' Well, I've paid enough for you to earn the title. There's food in the pack on the saddle there, and a pannikin. Get it, and don't just stand idly."

He staked Black Cloud near the pond to graze, pulled himself a pile of moss, and sat down against a tree. Dauna said nothing. He could hear the quick, sharp strokes of the hatchet as she moved through bushes bordering the pond. She returned with an armful of gathered twigs and went for more.

It grew darker and oppressive. Artillery's head was aching, and he felt a pressure against his eyes. He leaned back against the bark and made no move when he heard her attacking heavier wood. When she returned, laboriously dragging the heavy branch of a tree, he still ignored her. She laid the twigs and lit them, methodically adding heavier ones. Black Cloud turned to look at the flames, and went on grazing. The fire grew brighter. Dauna added larger pieces from the fallen bough, chopping them off with clean, sharp strokes, splitting the big ones neatly.

She took meal from the sack, and salted pork and four potatoes, got water in the pannikin and set it by the flames to boil. The corn meal she wetted and patted into oblong shape to be baked in the ashes.

"How can you watch something, and know that it really doesn't exist?" Artillery wondered dreamily.

She was more remote than the Indian girls who danced in the

village, more remote than the governor's lady who led the patgo ball. She was distant not only in mind, but body. A gulf had widened between them, dug unwittingly. It was a gulf that barred him also from the fire, and Black Cloud, and the green-leaf-covered pond. He sat detached on the edge of a crater, staring at life and movement which lacked substantiality.

Dauna stooped between his eyes and the fire. He found himself raptly conscious of her silhouetted body. Maybe that was why he had bought her. In the light shining through the single shift that clothed her, she looked softer in form than Angela, more delicate than the Indian girls who danced in sparkling, sweating nudeness, more wanton than Ysabelle or the brown girl with the naked breast in Fernandina.

Yet she still was far from being real. Only thoughts and words were real. Those you kept close to yourself until you knew them well, never daring to release them into action lest you lose them in fulfillment, and find the fulfillment bitter and far from what you really hoped to attain

"Bed this wench should the fancy seize you—and let it not lead to marriage." Words such as those had substance. The death of Doctor Ezekiel Buckhart merely served to carve them into stone. But so many other words in Artillery's life had been endowed with substance, too: the sonorous, ringing warnings—"*Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet—*"

Why must they always prohibit?

The poets he loved seemed so much better advisors, telling you in singing measures to do what you wanted to do. Their verses were written by men unafraid, with quills dipped deep into pulsing blood. Would Herrick or Scott or Cowper or Shakespeare have shuddered and blanched at those stone-carved prohibitions conceived by some shadowy prophet? Did Doctor Zeke shudder and blanch himself? Did John Donne?

Artillery had come too far, been loved too well, and listened too much in boyish fear to a man who was father and mother, just and stern. He could kill and maim and play at life and speak of love in rounded phrases in several tongues, but the flames inside him seemed to sear and blacken his soul, never to be quenched except by legal sanction.

Yet the legal sanction was not enough. Dauna was his by the highest price ever paid in the province. His longing for her was self-annihilation, demolishing his body, incendiary to his brain. He

felt himself something less than a man, for weakly he watched, and knew that any submission must be her own.

She stood erect, and again he cursed her in silence. She was mocking him without grin or laughter, animating every stinging nerve of his body more dexterously than she could have with stroking fingers. Each move she made was a crafty move, designed for revealment in front of the leaping flame.

"The food is ready, master."

"Bring it," he told her, trying for scorn, striving to give the commonplace words a whiplash of authority. Why couldn't he clap his hands like Dan, ignore this chattel as one might ignore a span of faithful oxen. To call her "slave" was merely to goad his own futility. To call her "Dauna" was to fight back tears at the sound of her name.

He ate somehow, and she took her share, squatting at a subservient distance from him. She remained alert to his every need, serving him with docility. Once he was finished, she scoured and washed the pannikins and restored them to the saddlepack. She gathered moss, laid a bed, then folded his blankets and put them down. The bed for herself was a moss-filled place in the scooped-out sand near the edge of the pond.

"You can take my greatcoat," he told her.

"I don't need it, master." She glanced at the sky, which was only smoke above the clearing. "I don't think it's going to rain."

She lay flat on her back with both hands clasped beneath her head, and he castigated himself for watching. She must know that in his vision every line of her body was pressed to bursting against her tightened gown, that every hollow and graceful curve was whispering to him, that the effort to stay his hands from caressing her had set his muscles to trembling. Doctor Zeke would call her a skillful slut, a wanton baggage, a temerarious trollop.

Doctor Zeke was dead.

Artillery unstrapped his guitar from the saddle and played and sang. He had never made such music before, and would never sing as well again. He sang of the old Conquistadors, and of wives and children left behind. His music told of valiant deeds, and broken hearts, and cities sacked, and tales of a new America.

He found chords which Damien had never taught him, and his voice was full, for his heart was ill. In words and melodies of his own, he told her stories of immature love and the first swift heat of a life unfolding, and the longing of an orphan child for parents.

The fire died down, and Artillery's life moved up to the night that Dan was taken. He finished his songs with Vicente Espinel:

"The good is doubtful;
The bad, sure and certain."

He rose and walked around the fire, and looked at her face in the ruby glow. Her breasts rose and fell and her eyes were closed. He plucked a single minor chord and waited. A twig in the fire crackled. One thin spiral of feeble smoke rose up to join the others. He bent, and put his lips to her hair. Her eyes stayed closed, and she lay unmoving.

He returned to his couch and closed his eyes. Instantly his mind was alive and galloping in a futile attempt to reason, as though weighing every defense and weakness might break the stockade of chastity hemming him in since the day he ceased to be a boy. He had no fears of the fires of hell, for their threat belonged to another world. He was balked by his loyalty, the necessity to accept the word of Doctor Zeke that dalliance connoted wrong, the necessity to believe his eyes that the promiscuity of Dan McKetch had led by a devious, crooked road to Dan's last fall.

He had questioned Doctor Zeke's God before. The consciousness of Dauna's nearness renewed the gnawing doubts again. Would a being all-wise light flame inside of a single humble body, burn it with fires hotter than hell, and rule that to quench those flames was morally wrong?

He opened his eyes and looked at the fire. It glowed but dully, keeping its embers alive with an effort. He left his couch and found another log. He wanted to taste his life to the full. Doctor Zeke was old, and had taught him out of dying embers, but so much of his teaching had been so good, he felt constrained to accept it all.

The smoke hung low above the treetops. The forest lay dead, shrouding him without a crackle. The smoke was bad, but it had a purpose, for no mosquitoes swarmed against the pall. He could find a purpose for everything but his own life and its meager years. Dauna might have been destiny, or Bethany might have given him purpose. Through no fault of his own one had cancelled the other, and both were lost to him forever.

He felt the clutch of a warning chill, and pulled a blanket over him. His teeth began to knock and chatter. His muscles twitched. Pain came back to plague the wound in his arm. The swift chill passed, and he lay for a time in a state of being unbearably warm.

The graziers' fires had a purpose, too. The woods would be free of marauders in animal or human form. He could rest unmolested. He turned and stretched out an arm. His fingers touched moss, and he gently stroked it. It might be hair—bronze-gold or black—but he lacked the wit and the knowledge of life to caress the hair of any woman. The strength of his body must spend itself in stroking Black Cloud's mane or patting the softness of moss on the sandy ground.

His eyes and head were burning. He half rose, stripped to the waist, pushed the blanket from him, and lay back down. He closed his eyes. When they opened again, the queerest of lights from hidden stars, and perhaps a moon, was filtering through above him. He sensed, more than heard, the slither of sand, the brush of slippery pine needles, the turning of leaves where there was no wind.

Relaxed, he waited. There was no use to look to see what was crawling toward him. Like Beth and Dauna, the light from the fire had died into ashes.

He would never learn. The raid on Fort George had taught him nothing. The killing of Drummond had taught him less. The capture of El Tarantula had merely been funny.

Now it might be far too late to learn the law of the province—that you slept with your pistols and knife beside you, and not hung over your saddle twenty feet away. The law of the province was harsh and old. You slept with a woman and pistols, too. Forget the pistols when lost in love, and neither of you might live to see the dawn.

She struck while he still was listening, on him out of the darkness, quick as a snake in her wriggling, more silent than a cougar and nearly as strong. He saw the glint of the rising blade, a wavering line in the eerie light, spectral as the trail of a fish through phosphorescent water, or a streak of St. Elmo's fire.

He reached and grasped her descending wrist, but partially failed to check the knife. The point struck into his shoulder, slid as he jumped, and tore a shallow four-inch gash above the bicep of his wounded arm.

He twisted as he had twisted the wrist of Ysabelle, wrenched until he thought her slender arm must break. When the knife at last had dropped from her fingers, she fought him, using every trick of fang and claw. She had thrown him in the forests and outstripped him afoot, but that was part of the bygone years. All her strength and suppleness was useless now. She was fighting a man

demented with hurt, deranged with the thought of treachery. She was battling maniacal strength that was pitiless, not the feeble arms of a growing boy.

"Slut!" he called her in the darkness, muttering every obscenity. "Trollop—vixen—filthy, dirty sow—"

"Master." She laughed, and he went insane. "You said you'd kill me if I called you that." She spat in his face as he held her. "Puny little pap of a suckling! Why don't you kill me now and then go back to the fair-haired trull who whipped your face like the rump of her mare? Did you think I'd heard naught in St. Augustine, chained in my filthy quarters?"

"Silence!" he ordered, crushing her closer. He was hot inside with the heat of fever, cold with the ice of the passing chill.

"I'll have my say." She laughed again. "Your fair-skinned bitch is sleeping tonight with some Spanish dog, warming to him, forgetting the love of the yellow-haired weakling without the strength to bend her to his will."

The ice inside him consumed the fire. "I'll tear the lying tongue from your head!" He slammed her down in a pile at his feet, and still she laughed.

"Do you think I fear you? The old man with the beard was stronger."

He ripped the strap from his saddlebags and slashed her twice with all his strength as she lay on the ground.

"A eunuch does better!" The laugh that was tearing his mind apart came rippling out on a different note. "Only a eunuch would buy me to free me."

Her scornful mirth succeeded at last in snapping every restraining bond. His life closed in, leaving nothing but the clearing, containing neither good nor evil, nor God nor devil. She had done what the knife and the taunting and love could never have done, filled him at last with forgetfulness of everything decent in one blind urge to torture, maim, and kill.

He dragged her like a feather to the shadowy bulk of a slender pine, pulled her arms around it, and twisted the strap in cruel loops about her wrists, buckling them tight together. He had clearness of purpose now. Since she wanted to live as master and slave, he would play the game.

He gathered more twigs and built up the fire, adding a length of resinous log that would flare and splutter and give off the heat of his agonized soul. The flames shot up to singe the smoke above them. He grinned at the blood on his wounded arm, and thought

with a thrill of obscene delight of the naked girl in Drummond's camp with her arms tied high to the torture-pole.

Dauna stood silent, her shoulders shaking. For the space of a breath, his heart grew soft at this evidence of her weeping. He went to face her, and found she was shaking with silent mirth, her dark eyes glowing, her classic face amused and agleam.

"Puppy!" she said. "I'll kill you once you release me. It would be much better to leave me here and return to your trull in St. Augustine."

"I'll return when I'm finished." Her face and the fire were swimming before him. "I bought you to free you, and you tried to take my life for thanks. You've taught me something, *querida mia* —that rather than give gratitude, you'd mock and kill."

"A man who speaks with the tongue of a boy, and acts not at all!" She spat at his feet.

He thought of Felipa, the witch in Fernandina. "I'm going to whip the laughter from you. You've called me master, and taught me to like it. See when I'm finished if you can reward me with a single merry trill."

He took the knife with his own blood on it and cut the cord at her shoulders, then, seized with a frenzy, stripped the entire garment from her, ripping and tearing. Her expression stayed mocking. He went around and tightened the bonds, pulling her breasts up smartly to press against the sharp, rough bark of the tree. After that, he took his time, for she had stifled compassion and the fine moral fiber which since his youth had held him back from wrong. Restraint had broken, releasing on him a dammed-up flood of lustful ecstasy.

He searched the woods, selecting switches, cutting branches and trimming them, till he had six rods that were free of twigs, green and supple and long. Back in the clearing, he walked slowly around her, staring, anxious to make her feel her own ignominy by casually absorbing her nakedness.

"I should have let them strip you in the marketplace," he said grimly. "Oberon knew that such a body should never be owned by one alone. Wantons are designed to pleasure all."

"Except the callow and weak."

He ran his fingers over her body, savoring her helplessness, amused by her quiet scorn. She writhed as he tested her skin and its texture, pinching and patting her gently as a dealer might test the points and firmness of a fine brood mare.

Then, holding the rods together, he raised them high above

his head and searched for the spot that would pain her most. He knew that moment of waiting: defenseless flesh quivering under the torture of anticipation; the mind fighting vainly to blank itself, forget the shame of exposure, the lowered breeches, the humiliation of awaiting painful penance while forced into an attitude of prayer.

He was back in the compound. Doctor Zeke was reading a pertinent passage. The trembling boy who knelt in terror beside the cot wasn't thinking of his childish crimes or heavenly counsels, but was worrying about his buttocks, exposed to the summer air.

Artillery struck, but in his mind it wasn't on Dauna the stinging blow fell. It was on himself. In its bite was all the pain of a hundred whippings, all the hatred of himself for the cruelty of ever tying her there.

She went limp at the blow as though her heart had burst within her.

Artillery flung the switches from him, the corroding passion wiped in a stroke from his soul and brain. He might kill to defend the things he loved, but he had learned that the torturer tortured himself. He would never raise the lash above a human being again.

He unstrapped her wrists and caught her body before she fell, then carried her to her bed of moss in the scooped-out sand. With her own ripped garment he bathed her face and temples, smoothing back her dampened hair.

Dizziness and a nausea seized him. He left her resting, went to his own bed and lay down. He knew that later she would come and lie beside him, as he had known that night by the river.

After a while she was in his arms, the softness of her breasts against him, the feel of her body as soothing as the Wolf Creek water. Her silencing lips when he tried to speak were comforting and warm.

He knew now why he had waited—such great fulfillment could only be found with a love as great, and a body kept pure and strong.

Freed of his wracking yearning, tears came, and Dauna quietly kissed them away, holding him tight, with arms that said he could do no wrong.

"I wanted you," she whispered. "I wouldn't have killed you—I couldn't. I wanted you to beat me and love me, for your strength is mine."

"You're free," he told her.

She whispered very close to his ear, "I'll never be free. You

bought me many years ago and hold me with bonds that are tighter than gold or paper."

"I love you," he said, and with her arms still about him, the fever seized him, and he fell asleep.

When he woke in the morning, wracked with chills, Dauna was gone.

He saddled Black Cloud and rode from the pond with his head laid down on folded arms. By the time he reached St. Augustine and Lieutenant Sanchez led him in and took him to the Hulberts' house, his mind was entirely blank with raging fever.

BOOK FIVE

1811

★

BETHANY

★



THE porch of the house looked out over the St. Johns River. With the lesson in landscaping taken from John Houston McIntosh, Artillery had cleared the trees away to give an uninterrupted view. He liked to sit on the porch in the evening, staring out over the two-mile-wide expanse of water journeying slowly northward while the setting sun changed the surface from dazzling glass to shining coffee-brown. The mystery of the river had always enthralled him. There was ineffable peace in its stateliness, more than the ocean, for the constant movement of the ocean made him restless. The river washed out heartaches, smoothed out the scars of living, and filled him with a glorious calm.

The years had been kind. Inside he could hear Beth singing as she busied herself with supper. Betty, the baby, was sleeping in a net-covered cradle. Dan, following his mother about at her work, his chubby hands stuck into everything, had turned four on the fifth of May.

This was the tenth of June. His life beyond five years before was a picture, ending with his illness in St. Augustine and the hazy month when all he knew was that Beth or Mistress Sarah were by his bedside night and day.

He had put away all thoughts of Dauna; put them away when the sun was shining. Now and again she came back, alive and real, unasked and unwanted, to laugh at him out of the fireplace or touch his lips on a wakeful night or press herself against him when the smoke rolled low and the sky above was an inverted cup of gray. Yes, Dauna was part of the fading picture, something not to be thought of on an anniversary, nor any other time.

He turned his thoughts to Beth and the children. She had been

mysterious since morning, a comedy they went through each anniversary—Artillery saying nothing, Bethany preparing his favorite dishes, secretly hoping by some good fortune she would have to remind him before they retired that a man ceased to love when he forgot the date of his wedding day.

He left the porch, walked to the river's edge, then turned and looked at the house. Smoke rose from the chimney. The sunset reddened the windows. The dark green leaves of the mulberry trees in the grove to his right were turning darker at the close of day.

Some distance in back of the house, the white walls of the slave hut gleamed. The Negro couple, who helped with the grove, cost together less than a fifth the price of Dauna. Near the slave hut stood the stables, and between the house and the stables another long building, where Artillery's voracious stock of silkworms endlessly stuffed themselves on their diet of leaves from the mulberry trees.

He had learned a lot about silkworms since Daniel Hulbert had presented Beth with the elevated, dry, and well-drained tract along the river. Other settlers were watching his sericulture with interest, and listened with respect when Artillery talked of pebrine, flacherie, and grasserie, and other diseases which had wiped out his stock four times in the first two years.

Since then, the breeding and feeding house had been made much larger. He had taken hints from a booklet nearly two hundred years old, given him by Hulbert, every time he looked at it finding amusement in its archaic title, *Observations to be Followed, For the Making of Fit Roomes to Keepe Silk-wormes in: and For the Best Manner of Planting of Mulberry Trees, to feed them.*

His trees had been planted twenty feet apart, the cuttings placed in beds well-fertilized until they were rich and mellow. Even then, the trees had not been fit for feeding for four long years, and his first start had been made by taking leaves from wild trees through the woods and from an abandoned grove a few miles down the river.

The feeding house was now light and airy, and the worms lived on shelves of thin, planed boards that were perforated with holes, with another shelf below to catch the falling dirt and keep it from the floor. The undershelves had to be frequently washed in lime, kept clear of ants and other pests that might destroy the precious cocoons.

Still, for all the arduous labor, there was a more personal air

about silkworms than tobacco. Artillery had hopes that this year the worms would pay in returns more tangible than Beth's ample stock of homemade mulberry wine.

Artillery heard a creaking and the jangle of harness. A wagon, drawn by two fine grays, appeared from the southward around a bend in the trail.

"Hey, Dick and Marjorie!" He hailed the occupants, waving to the sun-tanned young man with sideburns who held the reins and the serious lovely girl beside him. The Benedicts were their nearest neighbors, four miles southward up the river. They were doing well with an orange grove, but had been sorrowed by the loss of their first baby the year before.

Beth came to the door and Dan rushed from the house to greet the couple who always brought him sweetmeats. Marjorie was dressed in her best summer gown, cascading with ruffles, and Artillery had a moment of heartache at the intensity with which she seized and hugged his golden-haired son.

It was all very mysterious, for a shrouded coffin-like object in the back of the wagon was carefully avoided.

Dick and Artillery settled on the porch to indulge in small talk while the women finished preparing supper. After young Dan was safely tucked in bed, Beth appeared on the porch with mugs of rum. They stood to drink.

Artillery said, "A toast." Beth's blue eyes were watching with adoration. "To the two prettiest women in the province, and the two luckiest men, and to my wife with her faulty memory, since she's forgotten entirely that just five years ago she and her father drove me up to Georgia in a buckboard and forced me into marrying her at the point of a gun."

"You were a horse when I met you, Mr. Armes," said Bethany, "and I'll leave to your imagination what I think you are today."

She was in his arms as soon as they drank, and the salt of tears was in the kisses she gave him. The sun went down behind the forest across the river. Artillery held her tighter, as though the moment could be stamped forever inside his heart and stay there, unchanging.

"Break," said Benedict. "A man can't live on love, Beth. We drove here to eat, not to witness beautiful scenes. Besides, we've something for you in the wagon."

Artillery held Beth still tighter and gently nibbled the tip of her ear.

"Fool," she whispered. "Lovely, precious, darling fool. Promise me you'll never change."

"I promise," he said. "Nothing but death could change me, and I love you better than life itself."

Dick and his wife went down the steps to the wagon. With the suddenness of Florida twilight, all color fled from the river. The water merged into the foliaged banks; the banks became part of the settling dark. For just an instant, the sky closed down and everywhere that the eye could see, the world looked steely gray.

The shrouded gift was carried in ceremoniously and uncovered to another toast of rum. It was a grandfather's clock, ordered from Charleston months before and stored at the Benedicts' cabin. The polished walnut case gleamed in the candlelight, adding richness and a sense of permanency to the simply furnished room. At the top of the face a hand-painted circlet depicted every twenty-four hours a fascinating rising sun and setting moon.

Beth stood silently looking at it, holding on to Artillery's hand. "It's a pity Father couldn't be here to see it. He'd think I married a real success. All we need now, Artillery, is a fortepiano, and we'll be in the McIntosh class."

"If the worms ever settle down to business and start spinning steadily instead of sickening and dying, we'll have one," Artillery promised.

They sat down to the supper of pork and eggs, and rice and gravy, topped by the lightest of corn bread and the best of Beth's coffee.

Beth's love of coffee always reminded Artillery of Mistress Sarah, who had lived just long enough to see her only grandson, and then died peacefully, as though all her wishes of life had been fulfilled. Daniel Hulbert had spent much time with them after Mistress Sarah's death, but a week before their fifth anniversary a crisis of more than passing importance had brought him a summons from Washington.

Artillery fell to talking about it over the coffee. "It looks like war between the United States and England," he said seriously. "A United States frigate, the *President,* had a battle off New York last month with the *Little Belt,* a British sloop of war, and forced her to strike her colors."

"I've heard it," said Benedict. "Last week there was talk of nothing else in St. Augustine. While I think Spain's sympathies are with the United States, since England has been highhanded with

her Orders in Council in taking seamen from American ships, nevertheless they're all rather hoping for a first-class war."

"How can you say that, Dick?" asked Marjorie. "How could anyone hope for a war?"

"Profits for the province, my dear." Artillery's laugh was bitter. "Look at the boom there's been in Fernandina for the past four years since President Jefferson's Embargo Act went in. Jefferson believed that American trade was essential to both England and France and that by cutting off trade from both he'd keep the United States out of trouble. All that happened was that ships from every port of the world started pouring into Fernandina. Slaves and supplies have been smuggled into Georgia, and when Beth and I were there last year, we found that Fernandina had doubled in size and turned into a wild, piratical town."

"I thought that embargo was repealed two years ago," said Dick.

"It's still applied to Great Britain and France," Artillery told him. "It was just repealed for other nations. Jefferson might have avoided this war which is brewing if the people of the United States had backed him. He said he hoped that his Embargo Act would show that there was some peaceable means of repressing injustice by making it the interest of the aggressor to do what is just and abstain from future wrong. The people wanted profits."

"And it looks as though they're going to get them," Dick remarked gravely, "since Jefferson went out and President Madison came in. I've heard that Congress is controlled by a young group—the 'War Hawks'—and they're all for playing with Napoleon. They're led by a couple of wild young men—Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun from South Carolina. They're scarcely older than you, Artillery."

"And haven't nearly as much sense," Beth put in, "from what Father has to say. Why, Thomas Jefferson and Madison and Monroe were statesmen, and building the United States into a country before those boys were born. Now they won't listen to anyone. Father says they claim that the United States can annex Canada in six weeks if war comes with England, and that's what they really want. He says that a young fellow, Felix Grundy from Tennessee, claims that the British are inciting the Indians in the West and down here to attack American settlers. We've certainly had no trouble with the Indians in a long time, and I don't believe it at all."

"Indians?" Dick Benedict's grave eyes moved slowly from Beth

to his wife. "What do you think about Grundy's statement, Artillery? You know more about Indians than I."

"I think when you're forcibly pushing people from lands they consider their own then it's difficult to know what incites those people to raid and kill. I do know that Felix Grundy had three brothers killed by the Indians, and that's enough to embitter any man, regardless of who was right or wrong. But to say the British are inciting them—"

He swallowed the last of his coffee and went to pour brandy before continuing. "Forbes and Company are giving them credit for arms and ammunition, tomahawks, and rum right now. Is that incitement, or is it legitimate trade? Or is it part of this war we're talking about between the United States and England?" He sat down and stared at his brandy, his blue eyes clouded.

"I think it's part of the war," said Dick. "If a British company has been arming the Creeks and the Seminoles, it's not hard to guess what nation they'll fight for if war should come."

"Which will you fight for?" Artillery asked him.

"I?" said Dick. "I'm a settler of Florida and a citizen of Spain."

"You've heard me speak of Hasse Micco, Dick?"

"Yes—why?"

"He was here last month. He grazes some cattle which we own together, and he was on his way back from Fernandina. There were fifty British frigates at anchor in the St. Marys River. Does that mean anything to you at all?"

"My God!" said Dick slowly. "Do you think that England will attempt to take this province from Spain?"

"It's England or the United States," Artillery told him. "Why do you think Beth's father was called to Washington? He knows the situation here probably better than anyone. That's why he settled here six years ago at the request of Thomas Jefferson. You and I will fight either for the United States or England, Dick, for Florida will be under one of those two flags before, or as soon as, there comes a declaration of war."

"You mean that England or the United States will deliberately loot this colony from Spain? I thought that Congress was ready to buy years ago."

"Not Congress," said Artillery. "It was Jefferson who was ready to buy, or get it by colonization, or any way to avert a war with Spain. You've said yourself that Jefferson's out and Madison's in."

"Then it looks right now, with fifty frigates at Fernandina, that

England will strike." Dick gulped his brandy and left his chair, reminding Artillery of the night that McIntosh set down the brandy glass and smashed the slender stem. "Dash it, man, I want to live here peacefully, and raise a family as you have. I don't want to fight on either side in a bloody war."

"I don't think England will strike." Artillery watched Dick's pacing. "That would mean the assurance of a war with not only France, which she's fighting now, but with the United States and Spain."

"You don't think she wants a war with the United States?"

"Father doesn't think so," Beth offered quickly. "He says England's trying to keep us from playing with Napoleon, that she's in debt almost a billion pounds, and her exports have declined a third in the past few years, and the King went mad three months ago and should be in Bedlam."

"I'm mad myself," said Dick, "that a woman should have so much knowledge. And pray, how much is a billion pounds? It's a sum my slender purse will never hold, nor my feeble brain take in."

"Whatever it is," said Artillery, "I feel it's enough to make England want to keep from war. Which doesn't mean that both of us won't be wearing either a British or United States uniform—most likely the United States—if we sit idly by, doing nothing."

"And how," asked Dick, "can we stop a war?"

"We can't," said Artillery. "But let's look, Dick, at what's threatening us now. It's nothing but the weakness of Spain, who isn't able to protect her own settlers from Indians or thieves, let alone having this province we love being seized by another and stronger nation. There's a way to protect the settlers without putting them in a uniform to fight in a war for which they have no feeling and without losing their living in Florida, which is good today and will be better still so long as the province remains neutral and peaceful."

"Which, as you've pointed out," said Dick, "it never will under Spain. Name your plan, and I'll weigh it."

"It's not my own," said Artillery. "It's a plan of John Houston McIntosh and Beth's father, and Deputy United States Marshal Quentin."

"And most of Thomas Jefferson," Beth put in.

"But now it will be Madison's," said Artillery. "At least he's the President of the United States in name. I have a letter, Dick. It was brought to me by Hasse Micco. It's from Marshal Quentin. Here." He went to a table and took a folded paper from a drawer. "You might read it aloud so that Beth and Marjorie can hear."

Dick held it under the candles and read slowly. The letter was dated St. Marys, Georgia, early in May, the month before.

"Esteemed Sir:
The time has come to bring into fruition certain matters discussed with you and the late Doctor Ezekiel Buckhart many years ago. Your discretion and your friendship with John Houston McIntosh leads me to tell you in confidence that President Madison gave to Congress a secret message in January of this year. Acting on this message, Congress adopted a resolution that, taking into view the peculiar situation of Spain and her American provinces and considering the influence which the destiny of the territory adjoining the southern border of the United States may have upon their security, tranquillity, and commerce—the United States under the peculiar circumstances of the existing crisis cannot, without serious inquietude, see any part of the said territory pass into the hands of any foreign power—"

Dick looked up. "Is he referring to England or France, Artillery?"

"England, principally, although I think he means either one —or anyone."

Dick returned to the letter.

"and that a due regard to their own safety compels them to provide under certain contingencies for the temporary occupation of the said territory. They, at the same time, declare that the said territory shall in their hands remain subject to future negotiations.
"Two gentlemen, Mr. Armes, have been selected by Mr. Monroe, the Secretary of State, as Commissioners for carrying out this Act of Congress. These gentlemen are Colonel John McKee, an Indian agent, and General George Mathews, ex-governor of Georgia and a veteran of the Revolutionary War. They have already been in touch with Governor Folch of West Florida in an attempt to get that territory ceded to the United States in an amicable fashion.
"This mission, despite Governor Folch's assurances, has been without satisfactory results. General Mathews has now turned his efforts to East Florida and is operating out of

Point Peter, not far from here. He claims that the United States has promised him both troops and warships if he can obtain the cooperation of sufficient inhabitants of the province to start a revolt which will be successful.

"I point out to you, Mr. Armes, that it is not the intent of General Mathews or the United States to take over East Florida as an American possession, but to aid the discontented citizens of Florida to set up a new republic, governed by them and held by them in the United States' protection.

"Your cooperation would be invaluable, Mr. Armes, should you find sufficient interest in becoming a citizen and probably an important official in a country of your own.

I am, sir, expectantly,

"Your obedient servant,

"ANTHONY QUENTIN

"Deputy United States Marshal"

"There you have it better than I can explain it," said Artillery as Dick put down the letter. "The prosperous trade of Florida will be kept on. Fernandina will still be an open port, and likewise St. Augustine. Taxes will not be paid to Spain, nor to the United States, but to the settlers themselves as inhabitants of the East Florida Republic. We will be protected from foreign interference on every hand by the word of Congress and Secretary Monroe. Our laws of commerce and our wishes for slavery and our relationship with the Indians will be our own. We will be called upon to wear no uniform, nor fight any battles for any other nation except our own. What say you, Dick?"

"I say that when the time comes, Artillery, I'm with you and ready to go."

The women started on dishes, and the men went out on the porch together.

"When does this start?" asked Benedict.

Artillery said, "I'm riding up to see John Houston McIntosh in a day or so."

"You're taking Beth and the children to St. Augustine?"

"Why?" asked Artillery. "The silkworms are at a critical stage and need constant attention. She's stayed here many times before."

"A little while back," said Dick, "you asked me if I ever heard of Hasse Micco. Did you ever hear of Jumper?"

"Yes," said Artillery, "the fiercest and most unfriendly of the

Seminole chiefs." He stepped close to Dick and closed his hand tight on his arm. "Why did you mention Jumper?"

"Incited by someone," said Benedict, "British or not, he and his warriors raided Fort Mimms and massacred everyone in it just three days ago."

Artillery said, "That's a hundred miles south of here."

"Exactly," agreed Benedict. "The only reason that any one of us in the province is alive today, Artillery, is because news travels just a little bit faster than a war-mad Seminole."

2

THE FOREST WAS the same, standing dark and endless across an unchanged river. The river was the same, sweeping its mass of tea-reddish water without additional hurry northward toward the Cowford, Fort George, and its final tryst with the ocean.

The house stood firm and well-built on its post foundations, giving reminder only by its sturdiness of the back-breaking labor which had gone into every board and nail and joist and scantling, telling only of birth and travail by the yellow-haired boy who played out in front and the tot who crept on the living room floor.

The silkworms ate without cessation, except for the regular periods when they took time out to digest in a sleep of twenty-four hours, giving their breeder surcease from watching for a welcome night and a day.

Only the trees and the orchards were different. Artillery fell to watching them, suspecting that the change was within himself. The mulberry leaves were just as dark in their shade of green, the oranges just as gold and mellow. Behind the stables and the slave hut, the pines still looked straight and tall.

How did they turn into places of hiding—long, round posts of concealment—when no one was there? Mimms had moved no closer. It was still a hundred miles away. Why was he watching the trail by the river? News of Indian trouble traveled faster than forest fires, one settler riding at breakneck speed to warn another, families fleeing in rocking buckboards and jouncing gigs to reach the gates of St. Augustine.

Tad and Maria, the slave couple, were not alarmed, though as a rule slaves were the first to sense impending trouble, warned

by some mysterious, sensitive underground of their own. Tad was singing at his pruning, his wife in unconcerned contentment watching young Daniel at play.

Artillery saddled, kissed Beth and the children, and said, "I'm riding down to the Benedicts'."

"Why?" asked Beth. "It's going to be hot. We'll need more leaves by afternoon."

"I've some things to get," he told her lamely. "I'll be back in time to pull the leaves."

"Then hurry." She held him tight as she kissed him. She was never a woman to nag or question, firm in her love and her faith in his strength and ability. "I'll be glad to get rid of you for a while. You've done nothing but fidget for a week now since our anniversary. Tired of me?"

"Do you think so?" Artillery grinned.

"No," she said. "When you are, I'll know it."

"You certainly will," he told her. "The day I tire of you and the children, I'll go away and stay."

He rode south by the river, slowly at first, then quickening Black Cloud as the trees closed the house from view. He looked across the river, drinking in its sparkle, thinking that if he swam it now and rode straight north, night would find him in Cheti Haiola's village. He was growing soft. Beth and Dan and Betty had lulled him, aroused him into womanish contemplations of non-existent danger.

Northward across the river lay other Indian villages, strongholds of the Seminoles ruled by Bowlegs, their military chief, and his brother, the civil chief, the great King Payne. Artillery suppressed an impulse to swim the river, ride and talk to the two powerful leaders; go on farther to Cheti Haiola; ask them what wrongs—real or fancied—had motivated Jumper; argue with them; find out why any of their subchiefs resorted to violence; get some possible picture of what they hoped to gain. Of course, he knew the answer even better than the Indians—fear—panic at the threatened encroachment of the United States; terror at losing their homelands to anyone.

Using the only tactics they knew as years went by and their territory narrowed, they struck at random at the white invaders. It made no difference that the invaders killed were citizens of France or England, the United States or Spain.

The delicate smell of the blossoming orange trees was everywhere, reminding him of his own. He found Dick working in his

garden beside the grove, busy stacking melons to be carried to the bank and picked up by a sloop which made a fortnightly trip up and down the river.

"Ride on to the house. You're in time for lunch and a drink of rum." Dick's greeting was cordial, but overlaid with a touch of worry.

"I haven't time," Artillery told him. "I just dropped down to say hello. I've picking to do this afternoon, and have to get back again."

Dick asked quickly, "Is something wrong?"

"No," said Artillery. "You left me nervous the other night."

"About Jumper?"

"Yes."

"It's the woods," said Dick. "They upset me, too. They're so quiet and peaceful, but once in a while you're overpowered by loneliness. Then these rumors start, and you begin to get worried."

"Then you've heard nothing more?"

Dick pushed a forelock from his eyes. "You know if I had, you'd have heard it too, Artillery. I've lain awake at night and then gotten up from Marjorie's side and gone out to search the sky for the glare of a fire."

"Yes," said Artillery, "and you've also stopped in your work as I have to search the sky for a sign of smoke a dozen times each day." He wheeled Black Cloud. "How's the cottage coming?"

"Still not finished. Come and look."

"I'd better not." Artillery shook his head. "I have to get back, and if Marjorie sees me, she'll insist that I stay. I'll come down with Tad next month and give you a hand on the cottage when this hatch of worms is finished."

"There may be more news when the sloop comes in," Dick told him. "She's due here Saturday. If there is, I'll tell you."

Artillery said, "You and Marjorie come for supper anyway."

"Accepted," said Dick.

Wordlessly, they paused and searched the skies together. A flight of herons trailed across the river. To the north, a single buzzard soared. The sky was blue, with a few white-cottony clouds decorating the border. The forest lay flat in every direction, unmarred by a puff of gray.

Artillery said, "Let's go to St. Augustine tomorrow."

"St. Augustine? What for?"

Artillery's eyes went over the grove. "Marjorie looked peaked and worried at our party, Dick. Beth and the children need a change."

"For how long?"

"A week—ten days. We can all of us live in the Hulbert house and stay as long as we want to."

"The melons must be picked," said Benedict. "This is Wednesday, and I told you the sloop comes in on Saturday."

"Damn the melons!" said Artillery. "Damn the silkworms! Damn the peace and the quiet, and the pines, and all the unbroken sky! Pick your melons all night tonight, stack them up, and we'll leave tomorrow. Dan and Betty can ride in your wagon. Beth and I will take our horses."

Dick stood thoughtfully rubbing his nose. "I'd like to, Artillery, but it seems almighty like flying off the handle somehow, like we were almost running away."

"Maybe we are," said Artillery. "I've lived here all my life, Dick —many years longer than you. I get feelings—" He stopped, recognizing that feelings were something personal, and impossible to explain. "Once in the swamp I got a feeling, and jumped away from a piece of wood as big as my head, half hidden in the water. It was a snapping cooter with a beak as sharp as my tomahawk. It struck as I jumped, and its neck was a good foot long. I'd have lost a hand if I hadn't had that feeling, Dick."

"I wish I hadn't told you about Jumper. Don't you know that no news is good news?"

"No news about Seminoles who've massacred a fort as strong as Mimms and vanished into nothing is bad news for me," said Artillery. "They'll be drunk to a man, not only with blood lust and power, but with whisky, brandy, and rum. Until we find out where they are and what they're doing, my feeling is we'll be better off back of the guns at St. Augustine."

"If the sloop brings nothing," said Dick, "I'll go with you Saturday."

"I'm going tomorrow," Artillery told him. "You and Marjorie can join us when you like if you want to come."

"Damn the melons!" said Benedict. "I'll work tonight, and we'll be at your house at six in the morning. We'll get started before we're caught by the heat of the sun."

Artillery drove back with his spirits lighter. If Jumper had taken Fort Mimms with success, he might want to try for another one. Fort Picolata was badly manned, if at all. It protected the crossing of the St. Johns River six miles north of his home, on the trail from St. Augustine west to Pensacola. It had been very strong in years gone by, but under the weakened Spanish the settlers

preferred to go sixteen miles more to the surety of St. Augustine.

There were other forts between Mimms and Picolata, but, putting himself in Jumper's place searching another fort to take, Artillery figured that Picolata was far enough from the massacre to be a very likely one. It was guesswork, and it wasn't, but he knew for sure he would feel safer with Betty and Dan and Beth and Dick and his wife behind the gates and the walls of the strong Castillo.

He picked to a song all afternoon, deciding not to give Beth the news until after supper, when Dan was sleeping. If the boy once heard of the journey at dawn, all of them would be up all night with a sleepless, excited son.

Beth said nothing except, "I'll pack," when he told her.

He took a lantern and went outside to look at the worms, then walked on back to the slave hut to give last instructions to Tad and Maria.

When he came back into the house again, Beth took one look and whispered, "What's happened?"

"You might as well know," he told her. "The slaves are gone, and all their possessions with them."

"They were here before supper, Artillery."

"They're not here now, and we shouldn't be either." He went to the bedroom and looked at the sleeping children, then came back in and strode to the pegs on the living room wall. A moment later, he was busy checking every gun. When the guns were ready, he toured the house, closing the heavy shutters with their diamond loopholes, placing sturdy oaken bars across the front and back doors.

Beth said, white-faced, "We'll smother."

"If the Indians rush us," Artillery told her, "we'll burn."

"Do you think they'll come?"

"I think the slaves were warned to leave. If they attack tonight, Beth, it will be within an hour. After that, there's a moon. Once the moon comes up, the chances are they will wait until the darkest hour before the dawn."

"But we've had no warning, Artillery."

"That's why Jumper is called Jumper." He forced a smile. "He strikes at places some distance apart. He kills and burns and is gone. Beth—" She came close. He put a hand on her shoulder and stared deep into her eyes. "When the moon comes up, have you nerve enough to stay here for a couple of hours?"

"Dick and Marjorie?"

He nodded. "They must be brought here tonight—if they're

still alive. This house is as strong, and stronger, than Fort Picolata. We may be able to hold it. Whatever happens, I can't have Dick and Marjorie riding unprepared through the woods to meet us here at dawn."

"You'd better take Whitecap," she told him. "Black Cloud's tired. She's made the journey once today."

"She'll have to make it again tonight. Whitecap's too good a target in the moonlight."

"I'll stay," said Beth, "but try not to be too long. My heart will be dead all the time you're away."

They snuffed the candles, and watched through the ports in the shutters, moving slowly from window to window. Once, in the dark, he kissed her hair and eyes and lips.

He said, "Don't worry."

"I'm not worried so long as you're here, but I almost wish that something would happen. It's so dark outside, and so quiet, and everything looks unfamiliar. I wish it were day."

He went to the back, and was there so long that she came up and stood beside him.

"Do you see anything?"

"You look," he told her. "By the feeding house—close to the ground."

Beth peered out, and he went to another window. "Everything's moving," she whispered. "The trees, and the fence, and the plough by the stables."

"Those things come alive at night if you watch long enough," said Artillery. "They're really quite still."

He took his rifle from a place in the corner. Close to the house, a night bird uttered a call and startled the frogs into chorus on the river. A gentle scratching sounded on the barred front door. Artillery opened it a little, holding his foot against it. A shape wriggled in, and rose up in the darkness.

Beth released her breath and said, "Hasse Micco. Oh, thank Heaven!"

Without answering, Hasse Micco walked to a window at the north. He stood for a long time staring out.

When he turned, he said, "All our cattle's been taken. Jumper crossed the river to this side two hours ago between here and Fort Picolata. He has fifty warriors and twenty-five blacks with him. Chief Weatherby has crossed to this side some distance south of here with the same or a greater number of warriors. They're starting down this side to ravage and plunder, and plan to meet. They'll

strike you first, Artillery. You can't hold out against them. Get your horses and your children. There's still a chance I can guide you through them and get you safe to St. Augustine."

Artillery said, "We have friends, Hasse Micco—Dick Benedict and his wife—four miles south of here."

"A weakling deserts his friends in danger," said Hasse Micco. "Our course lies south, then east, to circle back through the woods. We have no time—but your friends go with us, too."

Beth picked up the baby and Artillery lifted his sleeping son, who stirred and murmured drowsily. Hasse Micco held the boy while Artillery saddled in darkness.

"I'll lead the way on foot," Hasse Micco said when the horses were ready. "You follow, not too far behind. We're safe for the time, but Weatherby's warriors will meet with Jumper's before daylight, and be all around us."

"You can ride in back of me," Artillery told him.

"I go ahead," said Hasse Micco. "These two chiefs know many tricks. If an ambush waits, it will be found by me, not you."

"Our way lies together, Hasse Micco."

"The years have brought you much knowledge," said Hasse Micco, "and given you a tongue that wags with the speed of a gator's tail. I lead, and you follow. You have women and children to bring through." He walked off quickly.

Artillery led the horses around to the front of the house and helped Beth mount with the baby. Dan stirred gently in his arms. He went up the steps and crossed the porch and stood inside the doorway. The grandfather's clock in the corner ticked louder than it had ever ticked before. He came out with his arm clasped tighter around the boy. He reached behind him, and moving as though some sleeping spirit inside the house might waken, closed the door. He went down the steps, his eyes turned toward the river, and swung himself into the saddle.

Almost to the Benedicts' place, he remembered that this was one of the nights when the silkworms would be sleeping.

The moon came up, lighting Dick on the river's bank, busy piling his melons. In the small, unfinished cabin, Marjorie was packing, preparing for the morning's journey. They listened to Hasse Micco in silence.

Dick said, "I'll hitch the wagon up."

Hasse Micco shook his head. "We travel on foot from here. I know a cave we can reach tonight and be concealed until Jumper and his warriors pass."

"I won't leave Whitecap." Beth stayed in the saddle, holding her baby stolidly.

"There are other horses"—Hasse Micco's dark face was just as stolid—"but children such as the two you have are not bred so easily. Jumper and Weatherby spread death in their path and torture the whites who fall in their hands. The blacks are worse. They've marched four white women naked for a hundred miles through swamps and forests from Fort Mimms because they captured those women's children and hold them by threats of torture to their little ones. I can hide us all safely in the cave if we get there, but not with the horses. Once turn them loose, and Jumper will find them and read the signs. The horses would give us away."

Dick said softly, "Leave them here, Artillery. We may find them again some day."

Beth got down and went in the house while Artillery unsaddled and stabled the mares.

Black and white. The world had slowly ripped apart in a matter of hours, blasted in twain by a force his eyes were unable to see. In years to come, some rider would pass on the river's bank and look through the ribs of the skeleton house at the shining moon as he had looked on the night of Drummond's raid at the walls of the old plantation. The rider would think as he had thought, "There somebody built a home, and the flames of time destroyed it, and the builder kissed the things he loved and saddled and rode away."

He slung his saddlebags over his shoulder and went back to Beth, but she had no smile when she saw him.

They reached the cave before daybreak, an aperture beneath a vast limestone rock, about five feet high and thirty feet wide. Hasse Micco lit a torch, and they moved into a place of beauty—a fairy chamber, a hundred feet wide and fifty feet high. By a bottomless stream of cold, transparent water, hungry, silent, and quieting the fretting children, they huddled all day. Three times Hasse Micco went out and returned in silence to squat among the stalactite columns and stare without words at the floor of uneven red clay.

When he led them out, it was night again. He moved more swiftly, urging them on by the very speed of his tireless Indian stride.

Artillery looked back. Far to the west, the sky by the river was edged with pinkish fire. Dan, in his arms, was asleep again. Dick was carrying the baby. The two girls stumbled along together, taking comfort from each other, arm in arm.

Artillery turned from the reddened sky and followed blindly.

The next thing he saw were the city gates of St. Augustine and the walls of the old Castillo. They were taking shape in the coming light. They looked safe and strong and welcome in their morning coats of gray.

3

THERE WAS SAFETY under the guns. For a week or more, by day and by night, settlers with their straggling cows, few remaining belongings and frightened families had filtered into St. Augustine. Then the influx stopped, reaction from danger set in, and gaiety filled the town.

Artillery and Beth, driving Daniel Hulbert's gig, followed the road along the San Sebastian River, and let the old horse halt and rest while they watched the rising of the moon. Young Dan and Betty had been fretful and listless since their arrival, not sleeping very well, as though they resented the adjustment from the freedom of their riverside home to the confines of a town. Betty had a touch of diarrhea. Marjorie Benedict had dismissed it as summer complaint and teething and insisted that she and Dick take over for an evening so that Artillery and Beth could have at least one night of recess.

Beth stared across the shimmering water. A light showed in the barracks of the watching dragoons. The woods lay black along the edge of the starlit sky.

"Can we ever go back?" she asked Artillery.

He looked at the river, the single light in the soldiers' barracks, the dark of the woods, and turned his eyes toward the moon, then put his arm around her waist and pulled her close.

"Can you stand it again—the hopes we've had, all gone in a minute, the constant fear and listening, the threat of death to the children and ourselves, the wasted toil? Look." He pointed across the river. "It's peaceful now—not a sign of a fire—but only because the Indians have found nothing more to destroy."

"Perhaps we'd better stay here. When Father returns, he may help us start a mulberry grove inside the city walls. I loved it so, Artillery—" She put her head on his shoulder and began to cry.

The night was rich with summer, fragrant with the smells of passing June, thick already with the promised heat of coming July. Mosquitoes hummed up from the grassy prairie bordering the river. Music drifted out from the square.

"Others will return," Artillery told her. "The ones who are sleeping in the cathedral and camping in the soldiers' barracks—they'll all go back to the blackened ruins and build again. They'll build with death at their elbow."

"Why do the Indians hate us so?" Beth asked him.

"They have no hate," he told her. "They kill for love of the things that are passing. They destroy for the fear of something new. They grow food to eat, and hunt to eat, and build houses to live in, and till their groves for the fruit from their trees. The white man does all of those things for money. He cuts the trees, shoots the game, and builds his house, as we did, to raise a grove to feed the worms to sell. There can be no peace between Indians and whites, Beth, until one or the other has conquered. The Indians will never understand a system built for profit. They are simple people with direct, straight minds. One thing they understand quite well is: there will be no peace until either the white man or the red man is banished forever, or the victor has become unconquerably strong."

Beth raised her head, and the moonlight caught and held her hair. "There's safety here behind the strength of the Spanish guns. We can ride together, and talk together, without my heart growing cold at the thought of the children. Nothing can take St. Augustine. I can't stand facing death again, Artillery. Do you mind if we stay?"

He thought of the house and the grandfather's clock and the hungry worms and the lily pads, moving softly northward along the banks of the St. Johns River.

"You're my life," he said, "and my home is where you're happy. Death can't find us in back of the guns."

The mosquitoes were growing thicker. "Death may not find us," said Bethany, "but if we stay here long, we'll be eaten alive. If you stopped at an inn, your wife, Mr. Armes, would join you in a bottle of wine."

"Your servant, my love." He kissed her, flicked the patient horse, and the gig moved on.

There was talk in the inn of war. It was a quiet place with just a few tables overlooking the square. Outside, the music strummed and the dancers pirouetted, lighted by the flickering torches glinting through the trees. Snatches of conversation pricked at Artillery, interrupted Beth and her plans for the future, cut into her hopeful building of another business, protected by the powder of Spain, and another house, reinforced forever by the coquina walls of St. Augustine—walls so thick that death could never enter.

Los Americanos. Their ships were too small, although they had

many—the policy of the frugal Jefferson. The British ships were larger, mounting more guns, carrying more men. Weight against numbers. A bulldog against a pack of terriers. Age and wisdom against yapping youth, not so tired and more daring. Which would win? How would the great Creek nation side? What of Spain?

Artillery touched Bethany's slender fingers on top of the wine-stained tablecloth. They got up and went outside to dance a couple of measures in the square.

Five long years. His golden-hafted tomahawk still quivered in the tree trunk over the sundered patgo bird. Between the dances, he made idle inquiry, and learned that some months before, Don Jose de Reduro, possessor of a tidy fortune, had sailed for Spain. The world was static, yet everything moved. The wind in the branches above the square was the swish of the auctioneer's cane.

They were in the midst of a whirling waltz when Artillery saw Hasse Micco. The Indian walked up through the couples, his dignity and savage finery contrasting sharply with the softness of the women's gowns and the sheen of the young men's stockings in the torch-lighted square. The old and the new. The savage and the civilized. The swamp at night with the swimming gators and the hoot of the owl and the governor's palace, with its formal botanical gardens looking over both tonight with a frowning stare.

At sight of the figure striding toward him, Artillery unconsciously held Beth closer. The guns in the fort grew shrunken and puny. The brave dragoons became painted puppets, moved by strings of destiny.

Hasse Micco said, "The Mistress Marjorie wants you. Your baby is ill."

His intelligent, deep eyes remained unchanged. He stood in a pose of timelessness. His voice was the voice of a man delivering a message, but the look on his face was the look of the youth who had cut his wrist by the burial tree. The bond that had held them together since boyhood suddenly spoke, and the speaking was very cruel. It was mocking Artillery's fatuous boast, "Death can't find us in back of the guns."

He turned from the dance with a weighted heart and hands of ice. A week before, Hasse Micco's appearance had broken a tryst. Tonight, Artillery had paid for the breaking by barking with too much bravado, like the hound who was safe from the bear in his master's kennels. *Your baby is ill.* His mind refused to name the

price, but deep in his heart that had turned to lead he knew as he climbed in the waiting gig that a death the guns could not put to rout had climbed in back and was riding with him there.

They stopped by the silent hospital and left word for Dr. Fitzpatrick with a sweet-faced, white-coifed nun.

Betty's skin was burning to touch when they reached the house. She was moaning very feebly. Marjorie was bathing the baby's face with cooling water. The heat of the room was stifling, for Marjorie had closed all the windows to protect the child from humors of the outside air.

The doctor came in an hour, felt the burning skin of the baby, and stared at her narrowed, reddened eyes with a knowing professional frown.

"Has she been in the woods?" he asked Artillery.

Beth told of their flight and the day in the cave and the nights on the road.

The kindly doctor brightened. "It's enough to lay any tot open to fever, and the diarrhea you speak of is that of the summer." He stared at the reddened eyes again. "Has she cried very much?"

"She has been fretful," Beth said, "ever since we got into town, but so has Dan, our boy."

"Where is he?" the doctor asked.

"In the other room. He's asleep right now."

"I'll just make sure before I leave," said Dr. Fitzpatrick. He walked into the other bedroom, carrying candles.

Dan lay with an arm outflung. His breathing was rapid, his fat cheeks flushed. The doctor put a hand on his forehead, and he turned in his sleep.

The doctor went back into Betty's room and looked at the baby's tongue. "I've some medicine in my saddlebag," he told Artillery. "Come out with me, and I'll leave it. You'd best give a dose to both of them. It's the way with children. One gets a touch of something, and the sight of it often gets the other down." He looked at Beth and Marjorie, then put a hand under Bethany's chin. "It's my orders, after the medicine's given, that both of you women get to bed and rest. You've been through much as well as the children. We don't want sickness breaking out among those who have come here for safety."

He walked out with Artillery, stopping just long enough in the living room for a tot of Daniel Hulbert's famous rum. Outside, the doctor stopped by his horse and stood looking in at Dick Benedict

and the women, who had seated themselves in the living room. Maria Sanchez Creek was gurgling loudly behind him. He fumbled in his saddlebag and came up with a phial.

"Nitre," he said, "and sugar of lead. 'Twill do no good, but the children may rest more easy. You hide things well, Senor Armes, and my heart goes out to such a man."

"I've little heart for anything," Artillery said, "if the truth is what I think it is."

"You've seen it before?"

"*Si*," said Artillery, "I've seen it before—too many times."

"Then when you saw the round blue eyes of your daughter narrowed and reddened like those of a ferret you knew the truth when you first looked down. I'd take your children to the hospital tonight, but 'twould do no good, just as I can do no good."

"Then who can help?" asked Artillery.

"There's just one overworked man of God," said Dr. Fitzpatrick. "Father Michael O'Reilly. But I've never found him too overworked with helping and praying to give a bit of the solace of God to others."

"I'm not of his faith," said Artillery.

"God cares little for faith if a man is good," said Dr. Fitzpatrick, "and neither does Father O'Reilly. I'll send him to see you. Let me know if the baby's tongue turns red, and I'll come again before dawn."

"Then you're sure yourself?" asked Artillery.

"As sure as a man can be who knows so little," said Dr. Fitzpatrick. "Your children have *vomito negro*—the yellow fever. Nothing can help you now but prayer. Since the refugees poured in last week, there are eight other cases in town." He mounted and rode off into the darkness.

Artillery went in, and packed the women off to bed, harassed Dick into taking a rest, and went to sit in Betty's room himself with a single burning candle. It was midnight and after when Beth came in, her red-gold hair in a flaming braid at the back of her dressing gown.

He took her gently into his arms and told her firmly, "They'll be all right."

She held him tighter, loath to release him, and for one hallowed minute that he never forgot his life and hers were welded forever together.

"I'm very tired," she said at last. "I'll sleep in the room beside Danny."

"Sleep well," he told her. "You're all my life. I'll call you if anything goes wrong."

At three o'clock, the doctor came with Father O'Reilly. Betty's tongue had turned bright red. The doctor gave her medicine and water, and together the three men knelt and prayed—priest, physician, and fighter.

Artillery stayed on his knees by the baby's bed for hours after the priest and doctor had left him. Light came in at the window. Betty neither stirred nor moaned. The enemy he was praying against was a foe who never heeded prayers, a foe who could slip, invisible, past the walls of the strongest fort or the muzzle of the biggest blazing gun—*vomito negro,* the killer.

When he went into Danny's bedroom at the break of day, he put his hand on Bethany's forehead and found it burning. He went outside in the orange grove and stood and shook his fist at the rising sun.

Three short days, minutes and lifetimes, long as the flames of purgatory, short as the minutes of happiness in a century's span, the black of night and the white of day, both blended into one. Safety in St. Augustine. Guns and walls and forts and moats. Rolling drums and the invincible trappings of God's appointed, the undefeatable Spanish dragoons.

On Tuesday, Pedro, gnarled and bent with five years more of arduous life, dug a tiny grave and buried Betty. On Thursday, the grave was larger and fairly worth a peso more, big enough to hold young Daniel, Artillery's son.

You drank while you waited, and deep in your soul you nurtured a hatred of yellow—faces turned yellow, bodies turned yellow, your guts turned yellow. You sat in the tavern and tried to drown it with yellower yellow, embodied in bowls of tasteless rum. Home to the house where you couldn't stay and back again.

"Hey, *bastardo!*"

"*Si, Excelencia.*"

"This time bring rum, brandy, and wine. I'll seek the streets, maybe to find a harlequina. You know what life was made for, *bastardo?*"

"*No, Excelencia.*"

"*Excelencia,* my arse! I'm Senor Armes, invincible with pistol and tomahawk. Artillery Armes—the killer—whom all men fear, from Fernandina south to this crawling, pestilence-ridden town."

"*Si,* senor."

"Brandy, wine, and rum, and quickly!"

"Quickly, senor."

"Who is the wench at the table there—the one in the frilly, ruffled gown? Is she German?"

"*No,* senor. The German one left many years ago."

"No matter. Bid her come over. Tell her a man with money waits her. Tell her to come and sit down."

Strange, the inn in the afternoon was so silent. Only the click of billiard balls. No life, no love, no laughter. No breeze from off the Matanzas. No air at all to brush away death, the captor of fort and the narrow streets, striking wherever it willed and wished with grim impartiality.

The woman had scarcely anything on beneath her ruffles, a style of the times to show that all women were made alike, with breasts, and belly, and buttocks, curved the same and bulging the same beneath the shield of a flimsy gown. He felt her thigh beneath the table and touched the end of his tomahawk blade. He could split her painted skull in two with a single stroke. Why should death sit by Bethany and leave this one free to laugh and cozen and sell her body for money?

"Have you visited the cathedral, senor?"

"*Si,*" he said. "It's dark and cool, and the seats are hard, but the backs are high."

He swilled a drink of the potent mixture, tossed gold on the table, and left the inn. The sun was blinding. Couples sat on the sea wall. He walked past cathedral and barracks and loitered a while at the magazine. It was full of powder, enough to kill a thousand men or women or children with one loud blast. He thought of the futile efforts of men to equal God in destruction, to equal God in anything.

His steps led toward the San Sebastian. Indians paddled a long canoe. He watched them without seeing. Bushes and trees and flowers moved past him. The city gates came up to meet him.

Lieutenant Sanchez said, "Senor Armes—you look very tired. I have some wine. It's better than most."

"We've both grown older," said Artillery.

"*Si,*" agreed the lieutenant. "I have a son of my own now—" He stopped, as one might stop when trapped in talking to a dead man. "There's a breeze up on the balcony, if anywhere."

They went inside and climbed the swinging stairway. The balcony overlooked the harbor, and beyond the Matanzas River a tower could be seen. To the left were the grim, gray walls of the old Castillo, and huddled beneath them, the houses of the pilots.

"The pilots live there," said Lieutenant Sanchez, pointing. "Lucky devils. They're appointed by the King and have the best jobs here in St. Augustine."

An orderly brought wine. It was somehow vaguely familiar, as though Artillery had seen it before or been there on some restless night, visiting this spot in some pleasant dream.

"Your health," said Sanchez.

"And yours, Senor Under-Lieutenant."

They drank together. "And the senora's," said Sanchez.

"And the senora's," repeated Artillery.

They drained the glasses, and filled them again. Artillery said, "And the health of all in St. Augustine."

They drank once more and the empty glasses tinkled into fragments on the flagstone walk in the garden below.

"You'll excuse me now, Senor Under-Lieutenant."

"But of course, Senor Armes."

Artillery went down the swinging stairs and stopped outside in some surprise. It seemed as though a squad should be waiting, and that Black Cloud should be tossing her head and a caparisoned drummer standing ready to whirl his sticks in rhythm. It must have been another day in another year that he had first stepped through the city gates.

He walked on back to the Hulbert house through the somnolent streets. Dick and Marjorie were waiting, sitting hand in hand in the living room.

Marjorie said, "There's still no change, but she's very weak. There's nothing you can do, Artillery. You should get some sleep."

He looked at the girl and her husband and gave them a smile. "There is no sleep; there's only death," he told them, and went on into Bethany's room.

He could not look at her yellowed face, so he sat by the bed with his eyes shut tight, holding her weakened hand in his for a very long while.

Finally she said, "Artillery—the children?"

"They're fine," he told her. "Well as can be."

She was silent then, and when at last he forced himself to look, the yellow seemed to have faded and her eyes were closed. He bent and kissed her, and left her with her red lips fixed forever in a happy smile.

In the living room, he put gold on the table, shook Dick's hand and wordlessly pressed a kiss on Marjorie's forehead. The look in his eyes would brook no questions.

He turned at the door and said, *"Hasta la vista,"* picked the saddlebags from the floor, and threw them over his shoulder.

In the orange grove, Pedro was waiting. Artillery pressed money into his palm, and said, "A third one, old one. Your wish of five years ago finally came true. Your business must be booming."

The old man sadly shook his head. "The saints can be very cruel, senor." He crossed himself. "They've turned a silly jest I made into a cruel lie. Rather than see the *vomito negro* touch this province in any spot, I myself would die."

"At least this time I have bodies for you," said Artillery.

He walked on toward the city gates, blue eyes hard and dry. He was out of the gates and plodding down the old King's Road when a hand fell on his shoulder.

"There are times when a man wants to be alone," said Hasse Micco, "when he feels that no one will understand, and seeks to complete the rest of his life with thoughts locked up within him. At the end of such a lonely road lies death to the spirit. The trail still lies long and rough before you. Until your heart is mended again, we'll travel it farther and faster together, you and I."

BOOK SIX

1812

★

SALUS POPULI LEX SUPREMA

★

CHAPTER 1

ARTILLERY pulled the blue roan to a halt and sat long enough to rest his tired muscles before fording the St. Marys River. Watch fires burned, and the candles in a hundred small tents made a village of mysterious lights on the American shore. The St. Marys, dividing the United States from Spain, was swifter than the broad St. Johns, but not so wide.

The roan he rode, one of the best from John Houston McIntosh's stables, even though weary could ford it with ease. The roan would never be as swift as Black Cloud nor her sire, Black Storm, but Artillery was forced to admit regretfully that the horse was possessed of more stamina than the sensitive Black Cloud, and could, by lasting longer, cover more miles of rough country in a single day. Six months before, when McIntosh had presented him with the horse, he had named it Storm in a moment of nostalgia.

He began to recapitulate the days, weeks, and months. Some great climax lay before him. Vainly he tried to enhance its importance by looking at the subdued lights of the soldiers' tents on the American shore. Elation should have possessed him, for the morrow promised culmination, fulfillment of all his childhood training, self-satisfaction from the knowledge that hours of study, punctuated by Doctor Zeke's cane, had provided him with a brain and a facile tongue.

Day and night, for six long months, he had ridden the province under McIntosh's canny instructions. Settlers and disgruntled citizens of Spain had been cajoled, promised, and threatened, wives and susceptible daughters won by the strength of Artillery's charm. He had watched them capitulate and pledge their support to the prospective East Florida Republic, one by one.

Had he really done this all? Those were American troops across the river. Their presence was unreal. He was unreal himself, and Storm. There was little satisfaction in being a disembodied horseman riding a spectral nag through non-existent time. He had tried the kisses of women and found them cold, tried rum and found it weak, and red wine bitter.

How long had it been since he had walked through the gates of St. Augustine and been joined by Hasse Micco? Nine months? A year? He had another companion, too—a disagreeable figure, as wraithlike as himself—Pedro, the gravedigger. Hasse Micco had been a help with the Indians, but not Pedro. Pedro kept reminding him of destiny, days that were past and faces gone, the futility of having a job to do.

Hasse Micco rode up out of the night and pulled to a halt, quieting his wiry reddish Indian pony beside Artillery.

"Our work is done. The Patriots are encamped at Lowe's Plantation, less than a mile from here at Lower Bluff on the river. The last ones expected reached there more than an hour ago."

"Patriots in truth!" said Artillery. "Rather call them insurgents. Of the eight men sent me by McIntosh to help me recruit there was but one Spaniard in the lot, and his name was Haddock—a name that rings more of fish than of Spain." He tightened his hold on the reins. "I hope I've done right, Hasse Micco. The two hundred men in the camp you just left are nearly all Americans, a third from Florida, but more from across the Georgia line."

Hasse Micco said, "Fires are quenched by strength and action. Decay and rotting wood lit those which are now consuming Spain. I have helped you in this because those who are against it make profits by traffic in human lives, and grow fat like leeches on human blood. Are you happy, Artillery, contented with your home on the river and your thriving silkworms? Are you satisfied as my people, despoiled of their lands and cattle, are satisfied with the strength of mighty Spain?"

"You know what you see," said Artillery. "Right now, without reassurance I have no heart to try living again."

"Then we cross to talk to General Mathews," said Hasse Micco. "Sorrow has held you since we left St. Augustine, and a man who broods sights his weapons badly. Tomorrow may be a day of fighting, for the Patriots under McIntosh and Colonel Ludowick Ashley move at dawn by boat for Amelia Island and the taking of Fernandina."

"There'll be no fighting, Hasse Micco." Artillery waited, his

hands still tight on the rein. "Don Justo Lopez has but ten dragoons to defend the town."

"He has but ten *dragoons,*" Hasse Micco corrected, "but volunteers have joined him—British sympathizers, who wish much to see this province go to England; smugglers, and their Negro retainers; pirates, from the ships in the harbor. They have dug up buried cannon and made langrage of nails and iron. Fort San Carlos has been reinforced with sandbags. Their numbers now are equal to those of McIntosh and Ashley. It is not going to be an easy fort to gain."

"The fault will lie with the United States soldiers across the river if McIntosh and Ashley fail." Artillery swore. "Something's gone wrong, Hasse Micco, or we wouldn't have been kept waiting two days and two nights at the Cowford. Fernandina should have been taken in an hour a week ago. Ashley and Mr. McIntosh were ready to march on St. Augustine just as soon as General Mathews and his American soldiers were ready to go. We'll find the cause of this delay across the river. Come on."

They rode up the bank to the edge of the ford, waded out till the bottom was lost, and let the horses strike out. When bottom was found on the opposite bank, the current had taken them past the camp downstream. A shot rang out above their heads as they rode back on the American shore. A corporal came up on the run with a guard of four and saluted when Artillery gave the countersign, "Salus populi."

The corporal went off to announce them, and a few minutes later they were led between two soldiers at stiff attention into a smoke-filled conference tent. Three officers sat behind a table, and Marshal Quentin occupied a chair at one end. Two richly dressed Spaniards were seated facing the officers, their backs toward the tent flaps. A couple of Creeks, importantly headdressed in chief's array and filling the tent with fumes from their pipes, were squatted along the tent wall on the floor.

Artillery scarcely heard Quentin's introductions to the suave, soulful-eyed Colonel Ralph Isaacs, secretary to General Mathews, and the dark, acidulous, sharp-faced French-descended Major Jacint Laval, commandant of the American troops in the temporary absence of their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel T. A. Smith. His eyes were for the ramrod-straight old soldier, General George Mathews, whose blue lightning gaze commanded everyone in the tent as it had commanded his troops against the Western Indians at Point Pleasant and his soldiers around Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War.

The Spaniards, Jose Hibberson and Jose de la Maza Arredondo, Artillery had seen in Fernandina. They rose and bowed stiffly, and Hibberson, who had broken off speaking when Artillery entered, resumed:

"As representatives of His Excellency, Don Justo Lopez, Commandant of Fernandina, we feel that we are entitled to know the truth, Senor General. You are the senior officer here. Across the river, almost, from your encampment, two hundred rebels have hoisted a flag on the Spanish shore. His Excellency, Don Justo, feels able to deal with those rebels should they attack Fernandina. He's unfortunately not able to deal with the United States Army should your men intend to cross the river and join them."

Arredondo, the other representative, spoke up, "And please bear in mind, Senor General, His Excellency, Don Justo, will consider any such move on the part of your troops an act of war."

Artillery waited tensely for Mathews' reply, but it was Major Jacint Laval who answered, his eyes glittering blackly under the whiteness of his powdered wig. "You find yourselves embarrassed, senors, and so do I. Let me correct an error. You have spoken of General Mathews' troops. They're not his troops. They are stationed here for the prevention of smuggling and not for any untoward act toward Spain. Until my superior officer, Colonel Smith, returns, the responsibility of what they do and where they go is mine."

"God damn it to hell, you blathering ass!" the General burst out. "You overstep yourself. I'll—"

"General—" Colonel Ralph Isaacs' voice was silky as he laid a hand on Mathews' arm. "It's not my place to interfere, but it might be interesting to hear what the Major has to say."

"You've already heard it, sir," continued Laval. "I question General Mathews' authority here. He has promised support from the soldiers under me—"

"Under Smith, you blatherskite!"

"And for the moment, under me," Laval went on. "Support to John Houston McIntosh and his rebels, encamped across the river. Ask him for his authority, senors, I beg of you. You are emissaries of Spain."

"And you, of France, instead of the United States, from what I can see!" General Mathews broke in. "I didn't expect to have an officer of the United States Army turn out to be a puppet of Napoleon. No wonder you refuse to aid me."

"Your remarks shall be reported, General Mathews."

"And your actions a damn sight quicker," said Mathews, "and by me."

"In the meantime, senors," Laval went on, "the General has been fomenting trouble in your province for nearly a year. He appears to be doing it on his own, for he has no written authority from President Madison, Secretary Monroe, or anyone in Washington."

Matters were threatening to get out of hand. Marshal Quentin's face was dangerous, his fingers close to the pistol snuggled in his shirt front. Let these United States soldiers refuse their aid, and the promises made to a hundred settlers by Artillery would become the hollow pledges of an uninformed fool.

"One moment, Major," Artillery requested. "Trouble was fomenting in Florida long before General Mathews came here. I have helped recruit the Patriots under Mr. McIntosh, but my recruiting was done with the knowledge of the United States."

Quentin said, "That's true, Laval. You know it as well as I do. Mr. Armes was burned out by hostile Indians nearly a year ago. He was wounded in a raid on Fort George Plantation years ago."

"You settled in Florida at your own risk, Mr. Armes," Laval said frostily.

"I was born in Florida," Artillery told him. "I have a right, if anyone has, to resent the lack of protection given me by Spain. We have had certain promises from General Mathews, Major. I believe he has the authority to give these promises, despite what you say. Are your troops going to help us, or aren't they?"

"No," said Laval. He turned to the Spaniards. "Senors, I do not intend to lead any United States soldiers under my command into East Florida, nor will my men follow anyone else. You may take that message to Commandant Don Justo Lopez with my compliments."

"You gratify us greatly, Senor Major," said Hibberson.

"Before you get too God damn gratified, you had better listen to me!" General Mathews got to his feet and slapped his hand on the table. His face was a map of age and illness. Under his white-bound blue coat with its bright red facings, his straight, trim body looked frail. The epaulets of white seemed heavy on his shoulders. His eyes were the eyes of Doctor Zeke, dangerous and overpowering as a stormy sea.

"Do I look new in the army, senors? Are you dealing with a weak-bladdered boy? On August thirtieth of this year, I'll be sev-

enty-three. I've fought in the Revolution. I've rotted on a British prison ship. I was representative of Georgia here in the first national Congress and was made its governor here back in seventeen ninety-three."

"When you signed the notorious Yazoo Act," Laval put in sarcastically. "You had authority then, too, General Mathews, and used it, as I recall, to buy thirty-five million acres of western land for half a million dollars. It's a pity that every member of your legislature, save one, owned stock in the Yazoo Companies."

"God damn you, sir!" The General's blue-veined hand was trembling. "If I were younger—"

"I'm younger, General," said Colonel Isaacs. "The man's a low French charlatan, and a coward besides, or he'd never bring up an error for which you were cleared." He leaned across in front of the General and stared at Laval disgustedly. "If I didn't outrank you, sir, and had any thoughts that you might be a man of honor, I'd slap your face and let you answer to me."

The General said, "I can carry my own loads, Colonel Isaacs. We've work to do, or the petty French skunk could empty a pistol at me. I was saying, senors, that something more than a year ago the Congress of the United States passed a secret act, which is known now, commissioning me. Whether I have written word or not, I'm acting with their authority. I'm empowered by them to receive possession of the province of Florida or any part of it from the local authorities. I recognize the Patriots under John Houston McIntosh as the proper persons to make that delivery."

"And if His Excellency does not choose to make such delivery?" asked Arredondo.

"I've heard that blacks from Jamaica are to be landed by the British. I'd take such a landing to be an invasion by a foreign power, and the instant they put foot on shore I'll seize the province." He turned and stared down at the scowling Laval. "That goes for any Frenchman, too."

"I'm an officer of the United States," said Jacint Laval.

"Then try, before God, to act like one!" Mathews blurted out testily. He took off his pomponned cockade hat and put it on the table, then mopped his forehead. His face looked ravaged. "I've been battling malaria eight months now. Tell them the terms, Colonel Isaacs." He sat down weakly.

Colonel Isaacs said, "Senors, we offer the same terms to the province as the Patriots offer, under John Houston McIntosh and Colonel Ludowick Ashley, but only so long as Fernandina is sur-

rendered to the Patriots peacefully. Upon transfer of the region to the United States, all residents will be guaranteed security of person, property, and religion, full pay for all arrears in salaries, and the continuance for more than a year of existent commercial privileges."

"Does that mean that the port of Fernandina will still be open for trade with England in the event of a war?" Jose Arredondo asked.

"Senors," said Isaacs, "was Fernandina ever an open port for the enemies of Spain while Spain was at war?"

General Mathews broke out, "What the hell do you think we want it for? I'm tired of this shilly-shallying, and I hate diplomatic damnfoolery. I intend to take over the province from the Patriots for the United States, and I intend to help the Patriots take the province for the East Florida Republic, in spite of what you've heard from Major Jacint Laval. I think, gentlemen, that that is all, and you can give my compliments to the commandant."

The Spaniards stood up and made a bow. "Senor General," said Jose Hibberson, "Don Justo Lopez considers this insurrection an American invasion, stimulated by the promise of free lands. He asks that your support be withdrawn, and further offers to surrender Amelia Island to the United States direct if before the end of the week John Houston McIntosh and Colonel Ludowick Ashley and their insurgents have not been chased back over the St. Marys River. We feel that you should accept this offer, Senor General, since apparently the American troops in the encampment will adhere to the orders of Major Laval."

Mathews stood up again. "I have a few cards, Senor Hibberson, which you seem to have overlooked. I don't need the help of the soldiers here, nor of Major Laval, to carry out my commission from President Madison and Congress. It will pay you to stop at McIntosh's camp on your way back to Fernandina. McIntosh is talking to Commodore Hugh G. Campbell of the United States Navy there now."

Laval jumped to his feet. "Campbell won't dare move, except to support American soldiers."

"Holy Mother!" Mathews shouted. "You're commanding the U. S. Navy now! Talk to Commodore Campbell yourselves, senors. He has eight American warships lying in the St. Marys River right now. He doesn't intend to use his vessels in the name of the United States, but in behalf of the citizens of Spain who have declared their independence and who are calling on you and Commandant Lopez

to join them. We have word that Lopez is arming. Well, let him arm, senors! At the first shot fired against the Patriots of the East Florida Republic tomorrow, Commodore Campbell intends to open fire on Fernandina. From what I know of that cheesebox you have as a fort there, he'll blow the town off Amelia Island, I vow."

"That's your last word, General?" asked Hibberson.

"Until the morning," said Mathews, "but our terms still stand. However, if you think it will serve you further, I'll meet you at McIntosh's camp with Commodore Campbell first thing in the morning."

"We'll be there, but we're sure that His Excellency, Don Justo, does not intend to deal with Senor McIntosh and his rebels. You're making a mistake, Senor General."

"I've lived on mistakes for seventy-two years," said Mathews. "*Buenos noches* now."

Major Jacint Laval rose when the emissaries had gone, and the Indians on the floor rose with him. "You've put a stigma on your name tonight, sir, that will go down through history," he said to General Mathews with a frown.

"Stigma be damned!" said Mathews. "No man with a French name attached to him should ever be stationed along a border. The stigma on my name is nothing to the stink that will some day be attached to yours, Laval."

2

AT NINE O'CLOCK the following morning Artillery and Marshal Quentin, bearing a flag of truce from the Patriots, rode into Fernandina. Artillery had been there only once since the Marshal had halted his trip to Charleston with Doctor Zeke and Amy, and then Beth was with him. He reined in for a moment inside on the Calle de las Puertas de la Ciudad. Overnight, it seemed, the little town he had known had assumed the stature of a city. New houses had sprung up, lining the streets on every hand.

"It's grown," he told the Marshal.

"Fat on the blood of Negroes," said Quentin savagely. "Don Justo wrote Governor White two years ago asking for more warehouse space to pen them in. But it's not only Negroes; there are fifty merchantmen lying out there in the harbor now. They've been fighting for wharfage for a week and loading day and night with cotton

and supplies to go to England. They saw this rebellion coming, and want to get loaded before the United States takes over and shuts down with a war. If you think there's going to be no fight today, look there." The Marshal pointed to the marsh at the south of the town.

A motley collection of cannon had been mounted on makeshift carriages. Two men stood by each of the guns, which seemed well supplied with sacks of powder and piles of ball.

"The British ships haven't been idle," said Quentin. "They've supplied plenty of ammunition to Don Justo to defend his town. I hope that Mathews wasn't just blowing off last night when he talked of Commodore Campbell. There'll be hell to pay here if our American gunboats should decide to let us down."

A dragoon came up and saluted. "His Excellency will receive you."

From the Plaza de la Constitucion came a roll of the inevitable drum. The Governor was waiting in front of the fort, two aides beside him. His uniform was spotless and his demeanor proud, but Artillery felt that, like General Mathews, Don Justo Lopez looked careworn.

"My compliments, senors," Don Justo said formally, and then gave a glimpse of the indomitable Spanish fierceness which had enabled him for fifteen years, with just ten men, to hold a port which the powers of the world had made a pawn. "I am paying for an error, senors—the error that I did not shoot you both the very first day you set foot in Fernandina."

"It's late for errors, *Excelencia,*" said Quentin. "Your lookouts will soon inform you of several large boats on their way here from Lower Bluff. Within two hours, Mr. John Houston McIntosh will have landed a force of Patriots on Amelia Island. Mr. Armes precedes them now, *Excelencia,* on behalf of Mr. McIntosh to demand the surrender of Fernandina. I precede them on behalf of General George Mathews to reiterate the demand for this surrender."

"And I refuse," said Lopez. "Permit my aide to read you something received just half an hour ago."

The man at his right took out a paper and read in broken English:

> "You desire to know from me, sir, if the United States are to be considered as principals or auxiliaries. I have the greatest satisfaction in informing you that the United States are neither principals or auxiliaries, and that I am not au-

thorized to make any attack upon East Florida, and I have taken the firm resolution of not marching the troops of the United States, having no instructions to that effect.

"(Signed) JACINT LAVAL
"Major."

"What say you to that, senors?" asked Don Justo.

"Actions are stronger than letters," Quentin told him. "General Mathews will prove that to you shortly."

A dragoon galloped up and saluted before Don Justo could answer. "Boats have been sighted, *Excelencia.* They are loaded with men, all heavily armed, and are headed for Fernandina Bluff to land less than a mile from here."

"Man the gates and look to the cannons," Don Justo ordered.

The dragoon rode off. The commandant bowed to Quentin and Artillery. "You have my answer, senors. Blood will flow on Amelia Island before those rebels take this town."

A drum trilled out from the top of the fort. The quiet streets were suddenly full of confusion. Quentin pointed out toward the harbor. "Look, *Excelencia.*"

Artillery turned with Don Justo, remembering the morning he had waited on the point astride Black Cloud and waved goodbye to Amy.

Coming down the Amelia River in perfect line, with all sails set and striped flags stiff in the morning breeze, were six American gunboats. They tacked at the point, and one by one, just off the fort, five of the boats dropped anchor and lowered sail not two hundred yards from shore. With marked precision, spring lines were fastened to their cables. The boats hauled into position, their crews at battle stations and the guns trained full on Fort San Carlos. The sixth gunboat went about and continued sailing back and forth in a solitary patrol.

Townspeople crowded down to the wharves and began to yell: "Keep off or remain neutral until we decide the contest with the Patriots."

A warning came back from the gunboats, "If you fire on them, we will fire upon you."

More people crowded around the grave Don Justo, complaining, "All of Fernandina will be destroyed, *Excelencia.* What are you going to do?"

"I will bow to the force of superior arms," the commandant declared in sudden decision. "I will surrender to the United States,

but not to the rebels who have turned against my country." His eyes went up to the red and yellow flag of Spain at the top of the flagpole in the plaza. Every day since 1783, it had streaked the sky with its vivid colors, under sun or rain. Arrogance faded, and slowly his figure seemed to shrink inside of his uniform. Speaking to no one, he said, "Haul it down."

The crowd stood in silence.

"The flag?" asked Jose Hibberson, who had played emissary to Mathews the night before.

"*Si*, the flag."

"There are still a few Spaniards, *Excelencia,* who would prefer to die than to dip, in bloodless surrender, the flag of Spain." Hibberson blew on the tip of a glowing match he held in his fingers. "Permit me to enter the fort, *Excelencia,* and I'll touch this match to a cannon, giving answer to the American ships with a round shot."

"My duties are to protect as well as defend, Senor Hibberson," said Don Justo. "For five years now and longer, I've asked for men, for guns, for ball, and for powder. Nothing has been sent me, either from Mexico, Cuba, St. Augustine, or Spain. His Majesty's ears have been deaf to all pleas from Fernandina. When a king grows deaf to the pleas of his outposts, those outposts fall. With a tumbledown fort and ten dragoons and a handful of loyal Spanish, I find myself facing a battery of twenty-four-pounders, trained from American gunboats—a battery that's half a mile long. My position is to defend, senors, but not to murder."

Artillery felt a surge of sympathy for Don Justo. Regardless of nationality, bravery mixed with caution were qualities to be admired in any man. Both were present in Don Justo Lopez, faced with the greatest crisis of his long career.

"Haul down the flag, and I'll offer it in surrender—surrender to the United States, but not to Spanish traitors," the commandant continued. "I have kept Fernandina for fifteen years in safety against Indians, pirates, moccasin boys, and half-crazed bands of fleeing slaves. That single shot from a gun, Senor Hibberson, would bring a blast from those gunboats that means annihilation. The decision must be mine. I am proud of my name, but not so proud as on my last day as Governor of Fernandina to want to kill us all."

He was silent as men moved forward. Drums rolled out and, slow as a dirge, the red and yellow flag came down.

Artillery watched as a boat put out toward the warships, a Spanish dragoon standing rigid in the bow. He held the flag cradled

in both his arms, and the red was bright as a streak of blood across the white of his uniform.

Words of the parley which followed floated across the water to shore, and after a while the boat returned.

"The Americans refuse to accept it, *Excelencia,*" the soldier reported. "They say we must deal with McIntosh and his rebels, who are nearly outside our gates right now. If we fire on the rebels, the gunboats say they'll destroy us."

Don Justo straightened his shoulders. "Hoist it again."

The flag went up, was caught by the wind, and straightened.

"Now open the gates and spike our guns," Don Justo commanded.

"The gates, *Excelencia*?"

"The gates," he repeated. "Open them wide and remove all guards. Gunboats are gunboats, whatever flag they fly, senors. I might defeat the rebels, and I think I can with your loyal help, but I find the combination of rebels and gunboats far too strong. I find myself defeated, senors."

An hour later, the patrolling gunboat fired two shots. At the signal, two hundred and fifty Patriots, cheering and singing, with McIntosh and Ashley at their head, marched unmolested into Fernandina.

The square was filled with a strangely assorted throng—graziers and woodsmen; Negro farmers, mingling for the moment on equal terms with lawless, bearded Georgians; and impecunious rowdies from across the border. There was a sprinkling of Spaniards, and Artillery had a glimpse of Gabriel Ferrer, the hunter he had met at Juan Jiminez's inn, and half a dozen settlers from the banks of the St. Johns River. From every direction came greetings of settlers he had visited and talked to on behalf of McIntosh's cause.

But it was McIntosh himself who placed a hand upon his shoulder in a gesture of affection and said, "The province is free of Spain, Artillery Armes, and much of the credit belongs to you."

"It's to the McIntoshes, sir, that all credit is due," Artillery said when for the second time the Spanish flag came down.

A new one was hoisted while Don Justo watched—the flag of the East Florida Republic, designed by Colonel Ralph Isaacs, a flag of white and blue.

On its field of white was a four-word motto, "Salus Populi Lex Suprema," and in its center a charging soldier, with bayonet fixed, was done in blue. As the flag whipped out, the milling crowd

fell silent, and turned toward the harbor. With a noisy rattle of chains and shrouds, the American gunboats, their mission completed, hoisted sails and anchors, and withdrew.

There came another roll of drums, and Colonel Ludowick Ashley stood up to address the crowd from a makeshift chair. Artillery thought that the flag might change and a nation fall, but the drums rolled on.

He had never seen Colonel Ashley before and found him not too prepossessing—a powerful man with bushy brows and overlarge ears, which gave his face a constant acrimonious expression. The Colonel was dressed in a recently designed Republic uniform, which Artillery found to be a striking mixture of United States Army and Spanish dragoon. When he began to speak, Artillery understood better the Colonel's standing with McIntosh and his influence with the Patriots, for his voice was smooth and resonant and powerfully commanding without being disagreeably strong.

"I hereby accept Fernandina," he said, "in the name of the East Florida Republic, and on behalf of John Houston McIntosh who was elected President of that republic at Rose's Bluff three days ago. As Colonel Commandant of this Patriot Army, I warn you that under the flag of the East Florida Republic no disorder of any kind will be tolerated in this town, and none of the possessions of its citizens shall be seized unless first paid for and offered freely for sale; nor shall their bodies and personal property suffer any harm. Articles of Capitulation will be drawn up in conference with His Excellency, Don Justo Lopez, and signed this afternoon. My further orders—"

Artillery quietly slipped away as the Colonel's voice went on. He paused for a time on the point, watching the diminishing sails of the American gunboats, en route to the United States camp at Point Peter. They were joined by two others which had been watching the mouth of the harbor in warning to some British ships loitering off-shore, which might possibly, without interference, have sailed in to help defend the town.

When he turned his steps to the Paseo de las Damas, he walked through nearly deserted streets, for almost the entire population had packed itself into the square. He stopped in front of Celine's house. The doors were closed and the blinds all drawn. Finally, he went around to the back and tried the door. It was open, and he went inside.

The house had spread and been enlarged, and she sat alone in her sitting room. Her hair was white, and the face he remembered

had grown hard. Sun came in through the slatted blinds, adding bars of garish yellow to the richness of her gown.

She rose and kissed him without surprise, then looked at his face. "You're a man who has suffered, *cher ami.* Have you heard that Dan has been released?"

"No," he said, "I haven't heard." His heart was guilty, for months had passed while the ghoulish Pedro rode beside him, blotting out memories of everyone he had ever loved, including Dan.

"He's gone back to Amy in Charleston, Artillery. He stopped by here six months ago, an old and broken man." Celine smiled. "Yet my heart seemed to say that he loved me once because he stopped to see me. Is it strange to find me *triste* today because Spain has fallen?"

"Not too strange," said Artillery. "It's the passing of all that both of us have ever known. May it be for the better."

"May it be for the better," Celine repeated. "Sit down, *cher ami.* I'll bring us wine, and together you and the girl you once knew, Celine Lemain, will drink a toast to Amy and to Dan."

"So you lost your wife and the babies?" she said when the toast had been drunk.

"Who told you that?" His voice was dull.

She waved a hand about the room. "To hear all the news in the province, *cheri,* is the only compensation offered a woman who runs an establishment such as this one."

"Then you must know everything I've done."

"Quite well, *mon vieux*—from the rousing of the settlers to the flag which flies out there over Fernandina."

"Do you think I was right?"

"*Ma foi!*" she exclaimed. "Right to save us from war and bloodshed? Right to help us gain the protection of a nation as strong as America? Right to help the United States in checking ships which put in here from the African coast? Do you forget, Artillery, that all of this was started here many years ago, and that it was I who brought your skill to Marshal Quentin?"

"I've forgotten much," said Artillery.

"There are things to forget and things to remember." Celine placed a hand beneath his chin and searched his eyes. "If any fault attaches itself to what you have done, we must share it together. I have worked as hard as you have for it, and the fault is equally mine." She watched his walk to the table, the unsteadiness of the

bottle as he poured a brimful goblet, tossed it down, and filled a second. "You say that you've forgotten much?"

"Nearly everything." Artillery returned to the chair which faced her, and stared at the goblet, intent on a bar of sunlight drawing a ruby sheen from the surface of the wine.

"I taught you to play the game of kings when you were small, Artillery."

"I've never forgotten that, Celine." He looked at the chessmen in the corner.

"No," she agreed. "Your lips say that you've forgotten much. The trouble is that in your heart you've forgotten nothing."

"That's not true, Celine." He raised his head in sudden anger, and emptied half the goblet.

"But I know." Her chiding voice was soft. "I have love for sale, and men are the pawns in such a business, my friend. I know the state of their memories, and the weight of their hearts as well as their purses, and the depth of their sorrows by the manner in which they swallow rum and wine. No man was born to live without a woman."

"Then mark me down as a tippler." Artillery finished the rest of his drink. "A guzzling tosspot! Am I to blame for death that strikes thrice in a single week?"

"Only if you let its memories kill the boy I knew, waste his love and strength and heart, stifle the happiness he may find some day for himself and another woman. You can do that quickly, Artillery, when you swallow without tasting. Wine is not a drink for forgetfulness. It should bring to man the flavor of a sunny slope against his tongue, not the forgetfulness of berries from some poisoned vine."

"I prefer the poison, since everything I've loved is gone. I'll never know a woman I can love as Beth."

"There are a thousand loves," said Celine. "A million. One for each woman you'll meet in life, and one for each man. You have one lingering with you now, a different love from your love for Beth, a different love from your love for your children. Why not yield to its call, Artillery? You'll find it's healing, and just as strong."

He was seized with an urge to hurt her. "I have no love for any woman. You've sold too many favors, Celine. It has taught you to speak with a strumpet's tongue."

"I've learned that all men hate the truth, *cheri*, and answer it with insults when their tongues are loose with wine. No man living gives his fortune for a woman that he does not love. You see? I do hear everything."

"That slave I bought?" He stood and walked to the table again, poured more wine, and came back with his goblet empty. "The purchase was a favor to McIntosh, who had befriended me. What gave you the crazy idea I loved her?"

"You," said Celine, "since I know you better than any man who lives, unless it be Dan."

"She was a wanton slave who fired me," said Artillery. "May you burn in the fires of hell, Celine, for bringing her back to my mind!"

"You bought her to free her and wed her."

"I bought her to bed her," said Artillery. "She was insolent, so I stripped her and beat her. You call that love?"

"When love goes with it," said Celine, "even blows can be kind. I loved my father, who thrashed me, and you Doctor Zeke, who reared you under his stinging cane."

"She left me." Artillery's words were bitter. "Crept away in the morning when my brain was blank with fever. She knew that I wanted to marry her."

"So she ran away," said Celine, "because she thought that marrying a slave girl would hurt you; because she knew that her wild, dark beauty could never compete with Bethany's radiant hair and creamy skin."

"What witch woman told you that?"

"No witch woman," said Celine, "just an Indian who calls himself your friend—Hasse Micco. Dauna lives in Cheti Haiola's village."

"She hates me."

"It's been said that the ox is the dumbest of creatures." Celine reached out and took his hand. "That's not true, Artillery. My business also has taught me that the dumbest of creatures is man. Go back some day when your heart is healed and loneliness overcomes you. Ask her yourself if she hates you. You'll know the truth then. She's waiting. It will aid your soul to discover, my friend, that the love of a woman who runs away from the things she loves best because she knows that to stay is wrong is the strongest love in the world that a man can find."

"Some day I may go," said Artillery.

He kissed her and left and walked for an hour, scuffing up sand in the dusty streets. For an hour more, he sat on the knoll and stared out over the harbor, seeing nothing but leaping fires and long-past days because for the moment his heart and soul and eyes were blind.

He was sitting there when a shout went up from the plaza. He went to mingle with the Patriots, standing dully and listening as

McIntosh, with his Scottish burr, read the capitulation agreement while standing on a chair.

Only a single paragraph showed a victory for Spain:

> "That the island shall, twenty-four hours after the surrender, be ceded to the United States of America, under the express condition that the port of Fernandina shall not be subject to any of the restrictions on commerce that exist at present in the United States, but shall be open, as heretofore, to British and other vessels and produce, on paying the lawful tonnage and import duties; and, in case of actual war between the United States and Great Britain, the port of Fernandina shall be open to British merchant vessels and produce, and considered a free port until the first of May, 1813."

Not until Don Justo had forced that stipulation in protecting the trade of Fernandina for another year would he agree to sign.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, he scrawled his flourishing signature, "Justo Lopez," and under it John H. McIntosh wrote his name. Four men witnessed, and the pact was sealed.

Artillery looked up at the fluttering flag, with its motto in Latin, "The welfare of the people is the law supreme." Who could tell what the years would bring for the welfare of the people?

The Spanish drums began to roll. Don Justo barked an order, and his soldiers came to attention. Caught by an overpowering spell of history being written, every man in the Patriot Army stiffened to attention, too.

Don Justo snapped a salute to Ashley, and Colonel Ludowick Ashley returned it. The drums went into a cadence. The sun struck sharp on morions and glistening bayonets.

With the tears streaming down his weather-tanned cheeks, his men as stiff as marionettes, Don Justo Lopez, commandant of Fernandina, marched his defeated army of ten out of the gates of the little town forever.

3

AT FIRST SIGHT of Zephaniah Kingsley, silhouetted against the candlelight streaming out of the door of the mammoth

house at Laurel Grove, Artillery felt that he might be face to face with El Tarantula again. But the Scot, who by a combination of ingrained canniness, sheer, ruthless acquisitiveness, and a dour, persistent disregard of human lives and ethics, had built the biggest fortune in the province, radiated a more polished brand of menace than El Tarantula, a mere hired assassin, could ever hope to achieve.

The menace extended beyond the dwarflike figure itself, for the house, much larger than McIntosh's, had been built with an eye to a workable fortress. Ever since he entered the borders of Laurel Grove, thirty minutes distant down the river, Artillery had been glad of the thirty armed Patriots who rode at his back.

The party had been stopped by no one, nor seen anyone, but the narrow approach through overhanging trees had forced the horsemen to string out in single file. Artillery finally reached the house, full of the certain knowledge that had Zephaniah Kingsley so desired, the unwelcome visitors could have, and would have, been picked off neatly, one by one.

The impression was not lessened when Kingsley, through with his survey of the party, asked, "Who's in charge here?"

"I am, sir," Artillery informed him.

"You'll come in, please, and leave the rest of these men out here. They'll be provided with food and wine." He turned on his heel and went inside.

Artillery dismounted and followed into a weirdly decorated, brilliantly lighted hall. Claymores from Scotland, native shields from Africa, crossed with spears and poisoned arrows, were interspersed with military mementoes from old England in a belligerent frieze. Other savage souvenirs, hung in vivid display, attested to the owner's familiarity with the natives of the West Indies and Brazil. That Kingsley himself possessed a streak of barbarism as grim as the natives in whose flesh he dealt so freely was made evident by a gruesome exhibit of human scalps tacked in a jaunty pattern on one wall.

Kingsley took off his high-crowned Mexican sombrero, tossed it to a bowing Negro clad in the whitest of drill, and stepped up onto a dais where he seated himself in a high-backed chair, as imposing as a Spanish throne. His face had all the beneficence of a parrot as he stared at Artillery over his shirt of ruffled silk and his gold-buttoned coat of shimmering emerald-green. His stubby legs rose out of high-polished shoes with square silver buckles, which he planted firmly on a heavily brocaded stool.

"Sit you down," he said, his scrutiny finished. His scratchy voice spoke strong of his Scottish birth and clung much more than McIntosh's to the Highland burr. "I've heard of ye now these many years. You're Artillery Armes. You beat a man I thought was strong, then bid against my buyer, Oberon, paying an outlandish price for one Maroon. I've a dozen chained on the floor above that I'll sell you cheaper. Tell me, is that what brought you here? You don't look to me like a fool. I've taken half a dozen to wife and never paid a tenth as much money as you."

"I think you know quite well what brought me here, Mr. Kingsley. I've come from John Houston McIntosh and Colonel Ashley, and not to buy a girl. They want your support for the new East Florida Republic."

"You're sure it's not the United States that's wanting my support?" Kingsley leaned forward. "My messengers have brought me news that their soldiers under Colonel Smith and General Mathews have taken over Fernandina and the rest of the province down to the Cowford. American soldiers setting their feet on Spanish soil means a war between the United States and Spain."

"American soldiers have never set foot on Spanish soil, Mr. Kingsley. If that's the information you got from your messengers, you can count it as untrue."

"Then what's this rabble you brought to my door?" asked Kingsley. "If you've come for my help, young man, be frank. Tell me quickly what's been done and what it is you want me to do. I've some faith in John Houston McIntosh, for he's Scotch as I am, but from what I've been hearing these six months past, I'm led to believe he's a fool like you."

"He's been elected President of the East Florida Republic," Artillery explained. "We took Fernandina three days ago."

"Who took it," asked Kingsley, "—the American gunboats or you?"

"The Patriots of the East Florida Republic, Mr. Kingsley. We turned it over to General Mathews and his troops for the United States the following day. That was the agreement we had, and that's why the American gunboats backed us. We're marching on St. Augustine now, five hundred strong. All the settlers between the St. Marys River and the St. Johns River have joined our forces. Colonel Smith is following with General Mathews and a hundred United States soldiers. As our Patriots seize the province we hoist our own flag, then we turn it over to the United States and their soldiers the following day."

"By my word, a neat device!" said Kingsley. "When I come to study it, maybe McIntosh isn't such a fool. So Mathews and his soldiers are occupying the territory belonging to the East Florida Republic. Is that it, Mr. Armes?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the United States is never setting foot on land belonging to Spain. Is that it, Mr. Armes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then what's been happening to the settlers who were satisfied with their business, Mr. Armes, and who didn't want to join your East Florida Republic and become part of the great United States the following day?"

"So far everyone has joined, Mr. Kingsley, with a very few exceptions."

"Oh," said Kingsley, "there have been a few exceptions now. And I suppose the exceptions were easily persuaded?"

"They listened to reason," said Artillery.

"Aye," said Kingsley, "I've heard of the reason. No man with sense cares to see his crops destroyed and his house burned down."

"I've made no threats, Mr. Kingsley."

"It's wise you haven't," the little man said fiercely. "It's by paying no attention to threats that I've got where I am. Can you answer me a question? 'Tis a death offense to smuggle slaves into America across the Georgia line. For that I have no care. The slaves I bring from Africa I train here on my own plantation. They're treated well and taught their work, and they live happy, growing rice and sugar and oranges, and cotton, potatoes and corn. It's unfortunate that some of these savages prove ungrateful and think to find better homes for themselves in Georgia when they run away." He coughed and tried to read from Artillery's face if his meaning was clear.

"What I want to know is this, Mr. Armes," he went on. "If I support this East Florida Republic, will this province still be open for trading, and will my trade with England be left untouched—with England, I said, mark you, not with Africa—when the United States takes over my plantation tomorrow?"

"That's General Mathews' guarantee," Artillery told him.

A tocsin rang in an inside room, and Kingsley stepped down from his throne. "We'll go in and sup." He walked on ahead, avoiding Artillery's unflattering height. "My decisions are better when my stomach's full. After we've dined, I'll say what I have to say."

They sat at a table aglitter with glass and silver. A dignified Negress in a pure-white dress of classic lines, tied at the waist with

a rope of gold, came in carrying wine on a silver salver. Two great pearls, of bird's-egg size, were nestled in the blackness of her hair.

Kingsley stood and introduced her. "My wife, Mr. Armes—the Princess Anna Madegigine Jai."

She sat down with them while they drank, then rose again to serve the food. Kingsley explained briefly while she was out that she insisted on doing the work herself in deference to his guests, and following the custom of the long line of kings from which she was descended. He forbore to state a fact, which Artillery knew, that five other wives of varying degrees of African beauty resided in houses up and down the river within the bounds of his vast plantation, and that some fifteen children of varying shades bore testimony to the impartiality of Zephaniah Kingsley's spread affections.

"I've made up my mind," Kingsley stated when the dishes were moved and Anna Madegigine Jai had quietly taken her leave. "I'm joining with McIntosh, Mr. Armes. My boats, my crops, and all my slaves can be considered at the disposal of the new East Florida Republic. I will go further than that. I will advise your Colonel Ashley to divide his forces, using my boats to send half the men up the St. Johns River from the Cowford to land at Fort Picolata and make their way overland towards St. Augustine. They can join with the forces who are marching south on the old King's Road. With American soldiers helping and attacks from two different points, I doubt if the Spanish acting-governor, Estrada, will attempt to defend St. Augustine."

He pushed back his chair from the table. "I'm adding this, Mr. Armes. I have not joined with this so-called Patriotic rebellion because I believe in it, but because I feel I am forced to. I've heard what has happened to settlers who have refused and I intend to save myself and my property from harm. You can carry another message from me back to General George Mathews. I'm a peaceful citizen of Spain. For whatever this may cost me and whatever damage is done me now, the United States is going to have to pay me well."

The little man was not an idle boaster, for in five short years John Houston McIntosh was bankrupt and Kingsley was the owner of Fort George Plantation and living there with Anna Madegigine Jai. Artillery remembered the words even later when he heard that seventy-three thousand dollars had been awarded to Kingsley's heirs, an amount the United States government was eventually forced to pay.

With the promise of Kingsley's help behind them, the revolu-

tionists, followed by Colonel Smith and his American soldiers, pressed on toward St. Augustine. Artillery found the old, wooden Fort San Nicholas across from the Cowford in ruins when he reached there the following day.

Following Kingsley's suggestion, part of the forces took to boats and made their way south up the St. Johns River, coercing other settlers to join. Commodore Campbell, while taking no active part officially, still allowed two of the gunboats which had covered the rebels at Fernandina to sail ahead up the St. Johns River, protecting the progress of the American soldiers and maintaining communications with the Patriot force which was marching overland from the Cowford to St. Augustine. Gundy's sawmill fell, and Juan Jimenez's Halfway Inn. The heat of a Florida spring settled down, and the territory of the United States of America grew broader day by day.

On the twelfth of April, following a stirring patriotic speech, Colonel Ludowick Ashley hauled down the flag of the East Florida Republic which flew over old Fort Moosa, hurriedly abandoned some days before by the blacks who manned it. Colonel Smith took possession, and the American flag, with its fifteen bars and fifteen stars, was hoisted for the very first time within sight of the defenses of St. Augustine.

Seventy-five miles had been marched in a month without any real resistance, but even with forces pitifully weak, the sight of the American flag flying less than two miles outside of the Castillo de San Marcos began to grate on the nerves of Acting-Governor Estrada and his soldiers.

Days dragged on while the heat grew greater. The grumbling Patriots itched to attack, but Colonel Ludowick Ashley was cautious and knew better than most the strength of San Marcos. Trouble flared within the ranks, and Colonel Ashley one day found himself deposed and William Craig, one of the Spanish judges, elected as Commander. Colonel Ashley and his staff retired, taking with them a large number of horses which had been collected from the plantations during the march south from Fernandina.

Early one morning, a Spanish schooner with mounted guns was sighted coming up the creek toward old Fort Moosa. The Americans held their fire until the boat was near, then opened up with a rattle of musketry, but the schooner replied with cannon. A twenty-four-pound shot ripped into the walls and tore clear through the flimsy structure. Colonel Smith and his American soldiers and the Patriots under William Craig with him, lacking guns of such size to reply, were forced to withdraw.

They fell back onto the banks of the St. Johns River and formed a camp called New Hope, leaving only a small detachment under Colonel Smith at Four Mile Creek, some distance outside of St. Augustine.

Memories flooded back on Artillery at New Hope, for he found himself stationed not far from the site of his former home. There, without warning, disaster struck when everything looked brightest, and a chain of events was set in force that despoiled the province for fifty years and brought tragedy, sorrow, and poverty to every man, without exception, among the besiegers of St. Augustine.

A deputation of Seminoles arrived one morning, twenty warriors in battle array. They were headed by two brothers, the strongest and most powerful war chiefs in Florida—Bowlegs and King Payne. Hasse Micco, acting as a Patriot scout, introduced them, and they were received in council by General Mathews, John Houston McIntosh, and Zephaniah Kingsley. For its tragic results, the council was the shortest on record in history.

"We've come to offer our help," said Bowlegs. "With our warriors fighting beside American soldiers, St. Augustine will fall in an hour. We want the protection of the United States. We are tired of false promises from Spain."

"And we of warlike Indians," said Kingsley shortly.

The three white men conferred for a moment, then General Mathews spoke. "You'll do better to take your warriors back to your towns and remain there peaceably."

"It is impossible to live in peace in the midst of battles," said King Payne.

"The quarrels of white men are their own," General Mathews told him, "and not for the red man. I order you not to interfere, and to return to your towns again."

There was a muttering among the warriors. Payne and Bowlegs turned without answering and made their way back to the river's edge and the canoes which had brought them.

Artillery stood watching, his face hot as flame, Hasse Micco stolid beside him.

"You seem perturbed, young man," said Kingsley. "There's nothing to fear from Indians."

"A poor choice of a word, Zephaniah," McIntosh put in. "From what I know, Mr. Armes fears nothing, but perhaps he disagrees with our decision."

"Years ago," said Artillery, "I met a chief called Kinhaizee. He smoked in front of the wife of a Spanish governor. She had no fear

of Indians, nor any understanding of them. She called him a vermilion chimney, and ordered him out of the fortress her husband commanded. It cost the Spanish a hundred lives, and lost them a fort."

"Balderdash!" snapped Mathews. "What can these ragged Indians do?"

"With a thousand more behind them, sir, they can lose you all of the province you've taken. They're going now direct from here to offer their help to the governor of St. Augustine and take up arms for Spain."

As though the refusal of help from the Indians had pierced a cloud overloaded with adversity, calamities began to fall with the speed and numbers of drops of rain.

Young Captain Williams of the United States Marines and Captain Fort of the Infantry had been keeping communications open between General Mathews and Commander Craig, who were with the Patriots at New Hope, and Colonel Smith, commanding the small force of American regulars at Four Mile Creek outside of St. Augustine. Having traversed the length of Twelve Mile Swamp, which lay between, they arrived with a force of twenty men and two wagonloads of supplies, bearing the blackest news of all on the ninth of May.

General Mathews was removed from command and relieved of his commission, his place to be taken immediately by Governor D. B. Mitchell of Georgia.

The removal was short and to the point. Secretary of State Monroe, having been waited on with protests both from the British legation and Don Luis de Onis, the Spanish ambassador, was shocked and surprised to hear of General George Mathews' unseemly procedure. Apparently, the British and Spanish legations were possessed of far more thorough news services than those afforded to the United States Department of State, which might have accounted for Secretary Monroe's surprise.

Although Monroe paid tribute to Mathews' good faith, the fiery old general was forced to go. He left, an angry, mortified, and broken man, to die en route to Washington. Still a fighter at seventy-two, he had taken an oath to blow the State Department all to hell.

Captain Williams and Captain Fort departed on their return journey to Four Mile Creek on the twelfth of May, and entered the length of Twelve Mile Swamp about eight o'clock in the evening. Acting-Governor Estrada had not been idle. Fifty Negroes, led by a

free black named Prince, had laid a careful ambush. The wagons had scarcely entered the swamp when Captain Williams and six of his men fell dead beneath a vicious fire, and Captain Fort was badly wounded. When the remainder managed to rally and charge, not a Negro was to be seen.

For a month or more after Williams' death, Florida seemed to be waiting. The heat increased, and supplies grew short. Patriots and American soldiers had ravaged the land. Estrada had been replaced by Governor Kindelan, and serious famine threatened the citizens of St. Augustine. The news of the United States' declaration of war on England swept through the province toward the end of June.

Still Governor Mitchell, in Mathews' place, made no move to withdraw American troops from the province. When taxed with this by the new Spanish governor, Kindelan, Mitchell replied that arrangements for the removal of troops had been stopped by the wanton attack on Captain Williams, and he was awaiting further orders from President Madison.

On the twentieth of September, Colonel Smith removed his camp from Four Mile Creek to Davis Creek, twenty miles north of St. Augustine. Only two hundred and seventy men were left of the well-equipped American soldiers who had entered the province six months before. Most of them were ill with fever and all of them nearly naked.

Late on the night that Smith had moved, Artillery rode into the camp at Davis Creek with Hasse Micco.

"I've a message from Governor Mitchell, sir, encamped at New Hope."

"It's bad, I'm sure," said Colonel Smith. His brown eyes stared from a pallid face. "The only good thing which could come today would be orders to move from this cursed country."

"He sends you word that only twenty Patriots are left in the camp at New Hope, sir. The others have deserted during the past four weeks to move their wives and families into Georgia or protect their homes as best they may."

"Damn it, man, protect them from what—a handful of scraggly, unarmed Indians?"

"They're neither scraggly nor unarmed, sir," Artillery said. "Come look yourself." He led the way to the door of the tent. For five miles east the sky was pink and the treetops covered with a never-ending pall.

"Governor Kindelan promised something unpleasant unless you

moved your camp away from Four Mile Creek a month ago," Artillery told the officer. "He's furnished five hundred muskets and ammunition and tomahawks to Payne and Bowlegs. They're planning in a week or two to move into the United States and burn the whole of Georgia."

"And what the hell are they doing now?" Smith pointed out to the painted sky.

"Cleaning up," said Artillery. "There's not a single house nor grove nor crop left standing between here and the St. Marys River, nor for thirty miles west or southward of St. Augustine."

4

A SEPTEMBER STORM had come and gone, smashing pines and adding to the Indians' devastation, but leaving in its wake crisp October weather.

Artillery lay on a mudbank on the western bank of the St. Johns River, buried; interred as neatly and completely as though Pedro, the gravedigger, had performed the service and departed with five pesos. Mud was packed thick on his boots and clothes, enfolded his knapsack, and formed a coating for every inch of apparent skin. It was packed an inch thick as a mask for his face and a wig for his yellow hair.

Nothing but his eyes was visible. They peered out over the St. Johns River, sharper than Doctor Zeke's, more disillusioned than those of General Mathews, hard and uncompromising as two pieces of bluish stone. They were looking at nothing, for there was nothing left to look at, unless the frame of the watchtower at Fort Picolata, across the river, could be considered a thing of importance.

What was important when every house, every grove, every field, and every hope in the province of Florida had been burned and uprooted by unleashed savagery since the day the flag with its mocking motto was hoisted over Fernandina?

McIntosh's plantation razed, with only the big house left standing; Kingsley's under siege right now.

The will of the people is the law supreme. What a cursed stew of balderdash, as Mathews might have termed it! Even the Patriots had recognized the irony and been forced to change it to "Vox Populi Lex Suprema"—a pretty mess of irony still. *The voice of the people is the law supreme.* The voice of nothing. The voice of the

great United States, seeking to protect its shores from an enemy. The voice of guns and savage yells and rape and devastation, with nothing left but the Indians and two little towns, Fernandina and St. Augustine.

Vox Populi Lex Suprema. Try to cure ills with guns and drums, and you light a fuse to the flames of time. You find yourself buried in mud to your eyes, with heat beating down and a six-foot snake creeping toward you, with safety and love and food and your country changed into the remnants of some frightening, horrible dream.

Leaves stirred in the bushes near Artillery, and the snake that was crawling toward him coiled and settled itself for a baking in the sun. In a slow parade of moving shades, some Seminoles passed, their war paint bright. They moved along in single file, stepping in each other's footsteps. Farther along, they would leave the trail, leaping out sideways to left and right at carefully figured intervals until the trail ran through a deadly ambush. An unskilled tracker would never know from the footprints that a hundred braves had passed that way and lay in waiting on each side, but would lose his life with certainty, thinking he had followed only one.

The caked mud on Artillery kept off mosquitoes, but crawling insects in it had crept beneath his clothing to torment his stomach and spine. He lay as still as the log beside him. The forest was full of savage eyes, ready to spot any patch of quaking earth or read the signal of a trembling bush or a suspiciously quivering vine.

He turned his gaze to the river again. Ashes floated on the surface, all that was left of some settler's home. "I wonder," he thought, "if ashes blew onto the river and floated down to join the sea when Jumper fired the house that was Beth's and mine."

He waited long. The sun crept higher and the moccasin grew tired of warming itself and crawled away. When at last Artillery began to move, it was to edge himself along by inches toward a spot on the bank of the river where an inconspicuous brush pile lay. He went in under the brush pile as a homing gator might seek its hole. Under the branches and sticks and leaves, which looked from the surface as though the current had caught them and jammed them together, was a tiny one-man canoe.

Artillery lay flat and pushed the whole mass free of the shore with a one-armed thrust of the paddle. It drifted northward downstream with a logy current. Watching through a crevice in the twigs, he waited until the point where he had buried himself was lost to view. Still staying as flat as he could, he began to paddle. In an hour he reached the opposite bank. He landed and made the whole mass

fast to the shore with a painter, and, hidden by bushes and mangrove trees, walked swiftly back south toward Fort Picolata.

He was welcomed by a tall, dark man with deep bronze skin who wore a colonel's uniform of American blue.

"Colonel Newnan?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad you got here, sir."

"We met at Mr. Kingsley's plantation yesterday, and he furnished us boats to cross the river to New Switzerland," the Colonel told him. "We marched down here on this side early this morning."

"How many men do you have, sir?"

"Not enough." Colonel Daniel Newnan shook his head. "I have twenty marines from Captain Williams' company who are anxious to avenge his death. Another fifty of Captain Humphreys' riflemen and Captain Fort's infantry. Captain Fort's still suffering from the wound he got in the ambush that killed Williams, but he insists he be allowed to go. The balance are volunteers, but all skilled Indian fighters. I'd say we have a hundred and ten in all. Could you judge the strength of the Seminoles?"

"I'm afraid you'll meet five times that many," Artillery said gravely, "and maybe more. They're converging on Payne's town on the Alachua savanna. I counted at least a hundred in the last war party I watched go through."

"I can't help it if we meet a thousand," the Colonel declared. "An attack on Bowlegs and Payne's headquarters is the only thing that will stop their carrying destruction into Georgia. If they reach the St. Marys crazy with success as they are right now, God knows how many Creeks will join them. Our best fighters in Georgia have their hands full now with this English war." His sharp eyes estimated Artillery's mud-covered figure. "Can you guide us to Payne's town?"

"With Hasse Micco's help. He was to meet me here."

"He's inside the fort."

Artillery looked at the rowboats moored along the river's bank. "Who are your officers, sir?"

"Captain Humphreys, Captain Fort, and Lieutenants Reed and Broadnax. We have a quartermaster sergeant and a surgeon."

Artillery said, "I wish you had more men."

"Damn it, sir, I've more than I thought I'd get right now! Colonel Smith was hesitant about letting me ask for any volunteers. It's weakened the posts at Davis Creek and New Hope, not far from here. If the Spanish choose this time to attack and drive us out of

the province, we're finished. I'm not feeling too well myself. I'd like to be back with my own troops in Georgia. Six months of Florida's laid me by the heels with fever."

Artillery said, "I admire your courage, Colonel, and the men who volunteered with you. I'll do my best to get you through."

"Courage be damned!" said Newnan. "The chances are that not a man jack of us will return alive, but the very fact that we attack will throw the fear of God into Payne and Bowlegs. If we hope to keep those screaming hellions out of Georgia, this is a job that's got to be done."

Artillery said, "Hasse Micco and I will go ahead. We'll need another man to help. Hasse Micco will mark our trail, and I'll scout far to the right. We must have another man for the left to avoid an ambush. Who can you give us?"

"I have a hunter," Newnan told him. "Gabriel Ferrer; a Spaniard. As a scout, I think he's the best."

"I've met him." Artillery smiled. "I hope his insides are in better condition than when we met six years ago."

"I'll vouch for his courage anyhow," said Newnan.

"What provisions are you taking, Colonel?"

"A horse-drawn wagonful. It should last us four days, ten if supplemented with what game we can get. We have only twelve horses. I'd like to take a six-pounder or two, but we haven't oxen to drag them nor enough ammunition, and they'd only cause delay. How far is the savanna from here, Mr. Armes?"

Artillery's mind dropped back through the years to the boat he had pushed with Hasse Micco, and his night in the swamp, and the swimming gators, and the mighty herd of gentle deer. "A long ten leagues—maybe fifty miles. If we march without interruption, Colonel, and head southwest, we'll make it the third day."

"It's the coming back I'm thinking of," said Newnan.

"And I," said Artillery. "Drop three scouts out on your rear while we march, Colonel Newnan. Seminoles have a habit of being behind when you think they're in front. Warn your men to alertness. The peacefulness of the country that we're marching through has cost the lives of a hundred settlers by lulling them into a false sense of security. That's all I can tell you now, sir, except before leaving we might do well to pray."

A bugle blew, and the fort stirred into action. Gabriel Ferrer and Hasse Micco joined Artillery.

"You grow no older, *amigo*," Artillery told the hunter, "only

more withered, and your clothes more ragged. Much water has flowed in the river since we supped in Jimenez's inn. How are your bowels?"

"They weakened with my body, *Excelencia.*" Gabriel's hollow cheeks sunk deeper with a grin. "And you, *amigo,* seem to have bedded too long with that slave you bought in St. Augustine, of which all the province is still buzzing. You're blacker than she is, I'll vow." He squinted closer. "Or is that some carnival costume you wear to disguise the fairness of hair and skin?"

"It's mud," Artillery told him. He selected the smallest of the craft tied to shore, and the three climbed in.

An hour later, he was walking alone on sun-splashed ground under endless trees. He knew that Hasse Micco moved far to his left, unseen and unheard, and Gabriel Ferrer, far to the left of Hasse Micco, and that the little army marched behind, but the world was empty.

There was nothing left of danger and destruction, no souvenir of days that were gone and the things he had done except his rifle, held at ready, and the knowledge that the hoot of an owl would bring Hasse Micco.

He had seen two new flags over Florida, yet the country which he loved and of which Amy had spoken on the night she had sailed was just the same. Only Artillery Armes had changed, walking now with a heart that was scarred—to kill Hasse Micco's people.

Why was Hasse Micco with him?

Unable to answer the question, he felt that his power of reasoning was missing. Once as a boy he had worked out problems, looked to the future, felt high hopes, and believed in men and women. Trudging along on this mission of death, he felt that like the province, some fire had swept across his mind and scraped it clean.

A flock of herons flew up and winged above him unfrightened. Squirrels chattered in the trees. A coon sat on a branch and stared with ludicrous dignity. He thought of Dauna's mocking grin, and Beth and Danny and Betty.

Suddenly, he knew he was lonely with his soldiers, and fighters, and statesmen, and slavers: Mathews, Smith, and McIntosh; the Commodore and his cannon-filled ships; Don Justo and his uniformed men. They were shades, the lot, evanescent as dots of wind-blown chaff, as fleeting as the coppery Seminoles whose passing he had watched that morning.

Only love was real, and then not the love of birds and beasts and trees and flowers and lakes and prairies and the lure of a passing

province, but the feel of a woman held in your arms. Celine knew, but he had refused to believe her.

He might never return from this walk he was taking. What a trick to play on Doctor Zeke. What a trick to play on Artillery Armes, to let him be killed—a man devoid of feeling. He didn't need *vomito negro*, the killer! Walking, talking, eating, and sleeping, and acting as though he were still alive, he had killed himself in a single year. Yet with everything dead his instinct survived. It stopped him now and set him to listening. There had been no sound, yet his rifle was ready to fire, when he found that Hasse Micco was standing near.

"We bear south," said Hasse Micco. "I've marked the trail for the soldiers by moving a fallen tree. We'll reach two ponds as the sun goes down and stop between them until morning."

"We crossed the trail of Bowlegs' party two leagues back," Artillery told him.

"They're headed north," said Hasse Micco, "but later they turn as we turn, for both of us march toward death today."

Artillery asked, "Why do you help us, Hasse Micco?"

"Because Cheti Haiola believes, and I believe as Cheti Haiola, in what the white General Mathews said to Bowlegs and Payne. The white man's quarrels are not for the red. Like Cheti Haiola, I know what I see. The Americans are spreading like a fire. The Spaniards think to check the flames because they have used the pride of Payne and Bowlegs to start another. A wise man, Artillery, does not watch fire sweep through the woods and then light a second and larger fire behind his house to check it. He knows that to be caught between two fires means destruction, for the flames which he has lit himself burn with the heat of those he is fighting."

"Then what does he do?" Artillery asked.

"First," said Hasse Micco, "he seeks to move his village out of the way, but if fires surround him on all four sides, he fights the weakest."

"Payne and Bowlegs are very strong, Hasse Micco, and we very weak. Have you thought of that?"

"I've thought of how quickly the wind can turn," said Hasse Micco. "It blows at our back already with flames far hotter than Payne and Bowlegs use to destroy. I have said before that you have something in you of the understanding of both red men and white. I have some of both white and red, for since we were young we have been closely bound together. So together we hope that by killing one foolish red man we can save ten red men who are wise,

and let them move their villages away. Our survival lies in friendship, not in fighting, so I fight with the whites to win their friendship." He paused to listen.

"I know what I see, Artillery, and the flag we left on the fort at Picolata has red and white laid side by side, and stars that shine over them out of the blue of the sky above. I know how to read. That flag will fly over all of us some day."

He returned to the trail, leaving silence behind him, and Artillery moved on against nothing, marching to fight the Indians.

The Indians never really existed. They were fish heads on the bank of a stream, a single set of footprints left through boggy ground, a wood duck to be shot at as it flashed through trees above a creek, its brilliant plumage simulating war paint.

A Drummond could be brought to life. A Spanish dragoon could be laughed at in his fancy trappings. Raiders from Georgia could be seen, fired upon as they struck with stealthy quickness out of the night.

Indians were names and rumors, smoke clouds over the province, a home destroyed, and years of labor wiped from a slate. Indians were little children wearing masks, braves at play with a moss-filled ball, graceful women with shining skins, twisting their bodies to the heady whirr of rattles. Payne and Bowlegs; Jumper and Bowles and Chief Kinhaizee; Cheti Haiola and Hasse Micco. They were figments of a child at play, memories, like Dan McKetch, of an adolescent's dream.

The flat woods sloped. A tangled bayhead barred his way. Artillery chopped through and found himself on the bank of a running stream.

The water was clear and blue as a piece of picked-out sky fed by the welling volume of some great salt spring. A gator drowsed on the opposite bank. On a log beside it half a dozen turtles sat like brownish knots in a row. Below the surface, a thousand fish of every hue darted about in erratic schools. In the deepest spot, a catfish, half Artillery's size, lay on the bottom, a blob of motionless indigo.

Artillery reconnoitered the bank for a hundred yards in each direction, then divested himself of his deerskin pouch and weapons. Up to his neck, he stood in the stream until the water was roiled with mud from his clothing. He left the caking on face and hair, for it rendered him less conspicuous either by day or night. The surge of the water against his body cooled him for the moment and made his skin feel clean.

Farther upstream, he found a tree which served part way as a natural bridge. Pistols, knife, and tomahawk he placed in the pouch, tied it tight, and hurled it to the opposite bank, using the shoulder strap as a sling. He swam one-handed, holding his rifle clear of the water, until his feet touched bottom. The gator and turtle slept undisturbed as he passed them again.

There were still no signs of anything human. Artillery wrung and patted water from his dripping clothes. They were all he had left, except his weapons. Not a peso weighted his pockets. He might draw pay for scouting and for the help he had given McIntosh. Right now the idea seemed tawdry. The chances were he would never need it. If he lived, he would go and find Dauna.

He had left Picolata that morning disturbed and unhappy. Heading into the wilderness, he had found a chance to examine himself. The threat of death had made life precious. His talk with Hasse Micco had evolved a rational cause to fight for, and left him with a spirit that was serene.

The camp that night between the two ponds had double sentries posted. The rations were light, but Colonel Newnan wanted no shooting. The next day they marched through a world that had grown more silent, where heat pressed in as the jungle thickened.

On the third, both men and horses were lagging. Hasse Micco, tireless, mapped the route in a circle, deaf to Colonel Newnan's and Captain Humphreys' curses and the grumbling of the weary party. Swamps enfolded them, sucking at blistered, tired feet. Lakes were passed without a pause for water, some that looked cool in shining open country, others that looked foreboding, circled by impassable stands of ash and gum and cypress—evil lakes, where no trout swam, the domain of cooters and mudfish hidden under a surface of darkest green.

That night they camped in a narrow swamp, untented and in darkness, a prey to a billion insects and mosquitoes which swarmed along the bank of a sluggish stream. Nobody slept.

Artillery stood fifty yards from the camp, his back pressed tight to a cypress tree, and stared through blackness until his eyes were sharp with pain. Once he heard footsteps creeping up behind him, splashing softly and stopping through minutes which went like hours, then taking up the cautious splashing still nearer. He recognized a curious bear investigating the invasion of his home. Indians walked the swamp in silence. The splashing retreated after a time, and seconds passed so slowly he almost wished it would start again.

The false dawn came, and the trees took shape, and with it a mist that was gray. An order whispered through stiffened ranks, and the party moved on. Tall grass waved on the edge of the swamp. The scouts fell in closer. The sun struck warm over tops of trees, and half a mile from the edge of the swamp the mist was defeated. The great savanna lay ahead as the last gray wisp was swept away.

Streams wound round in a serpentine through emerald grass. Bonneted lakes were dotted far to left and right. Around the savanna stretched forests, and far beyond, the smudge of another swamp. Beyond that swamp was where the village of King Payne lay.

The party marched on at slowest pace, creeping through pines with muskets ready. The trees thinned out and a lake glistened suddenly bright on the right. All morning they had walked parallel to a branch of the swamp where the party had spent their sleepless night, and its head lay close to the left of the column. Another swamp, bordering the edge of the lake at right angles, blocked the column's passage not two hundred yards away. Flat savanna lay between.

Hasse Micco, close to Newnan, halted and pointed. Set like a picture against the edge of the swamp ahead, an Indian sat astride a great white stallion. Feathers of white formed a crown for his head. His face and torso were streaked with lines of white and vermilion.

Hasse Micco said, "King Payne."

Artillery looked at the sun above. It was twelve o'clock in the middle of the day.

5

"WE DIG in here." Colonel Newnan whipped out his orders. "We'll form an arrowhead. Captain Humphreys, take your marines and defend our right flank, next to the pond. Captain Fort, place your infantrymen on our left. Lieutenants Reed and Broadnax, I'm giving you the twenty-five best shots we have. They'll have two rifles each and loaders. You'll defend the middle."

Axes bit into two tall pines, and directly they fell with a crashing of branches to form a rude breastworks. Artillery found himself crouching back of a fallen tree beside Gabriel Ferrer.

King Payne vanished into the swamp.

A cloud of birds rose and wheeled above the savanna, then settled and rose a second time.

"*Amigo,* did you see those birds?" asked Ferrer.

"Yes," said Artillery.

"Well, there are just as many Indians hidden in that swamp over there." The hunter took off his skunkskin cap, and Artillery saw that moisture was dripping from his hair.

"Are you feeling quite well, Senor Ferrer?"

"Except for certain growlings within me." Gabriel mopped his brow. "It is always thus when I raise my gun against a panther or a bear."

Colonel Newnan and Hasse Micco came up to stand beside Artillery, shielded by the branches of the fallen pines.

Artillery checked his rifle and the priming of the musket which had been placed beside it, then looked to Doctor Zeke's matched pistols, knowing that if he searched the province he would never find a better pair. He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. The caked mud tasted salty. There was nothing ahead but the grass-grown ground that separated the swamp from the pine-tree fortress. He turned his head to study the defenses to left and right.

Hasse Micco said, "Bowlegs!"

Artillery snapped around to stare at the swamp. Payne was back, joined by Bowlegs on a dark brown pony. The two chiefs separated. As though they had been dropped from above, two hundred Seminoles suddenly appeared from nowhere, looking gaudier in their battle paint than a thousand Spanish dragoons.

"Merciful God," muttered Newnan. "We seem to have intercepted the entire war party bound for Georgia."

"We have," said Hasse Micco. "Payne's town is still two leagues away."

Payne raised a hand. The Seminoles divided into orderly columns which the chiefs, with excellent generalship, placed unhurriedly into positions at left and right.

Lieutenant Broadnax asked, "Do you think they know we're here, sir?"

"They know we're here," said Hasse Micco.

"I fear," said Newnan, "they also know how strong we are, or rather how weak. From this exhibition in the open, they apparently don't care."

Captain Humphreys called something unintelligible. Musket fire rattled out from the swamp ahead, indicating that a large part

of Payne's and Bowlegs' warriors were still in concealment. The Seminoles in the open dropped and became visible only by occasional tufts of feathers mingled with the waving grass. Ball shrieked over Artillery's head, smacking into the trees behind with reports that sounded louder than the musket fire.

Colonel Newnan sat down on a stump, laid a rifle across his knees, and stared through the masking foliage at Payne and Bowlegs, who were calmly riding up and down.

"I don't wonder they hold those warriors in the palms of their hands," he muttered. "They've the bravery of the devil, those two. Hold your fire a little longer. They're crawling up through the grass as Bowlegs orders them on."

Another blast came from the swamp and was trebled in intensity as the hidden warriors opened a crossfire from their places on the ground.

Lieutenant Broadnax said quietly, "Fire at will, but don't waste shots firing at nothing."

His command was almost lost under the whine and the earsplitting cracks of a triple hail of ball. Bark and leaves and pine cones showered over Fort and Broadnax. The birds in the savanna streamed up in a snowy flight and swept away toward safety.

Artillery pressed his rifle close to his cheek, steadied it across the log, and shot at a single moving feather. The feather stopped moving and vanished among the blades of grass.

Ferrer said, "*Amigo*, it eases the cramps within me to have you beside me. If we live, we should hunt together, for in a week we could fill the markets of St. Augustine. Watch—I dispose of those two red feathers yonder."

His gun roared out, and the two red feathers went down. It became a contest with nothing human about it—a crash of ball through the branches as Payne and Bowlegs urged their warriors ever closer—loading, priming, and firing until barrels grew too hot to touch—Bowlegs and Payne, galloping figures, always in the open, yet possessed of a clairvoyant judgment which kept them safely beyond the range of Newnan's deadly marksmen.

For two unchanging hours, the game went on. Then Newnan stood up and walked back along the lines of Captain Humphreys' marines and Fort's steadily shooting infantrymen. He returned and spoke to Reed and Broadnax.

"After three more rounds we cease fire. I'm dropping back to draw a charge. We're wasting ammunition here and doing no damage. When our bugle blows, we countercharge. Hold it now!"

A silence followed that was louder than the blasting rifles and cracking ball.

"Back, but hold your same positions!" the Colonel shouted. "Quickly now!"

Payne's white horse had been pulled to a halt when the soldiers ceased fire. For minutes the chief stayed motionless while Bowlegs cantered around.

Fifty yards back of where the battle had started, Newnan ordered, "Take cover!"

Artillery crouched behind a stump. Through the trees to his right he could see the lake, and far to the front the figure of Payne. Bushes cut off the legs of Payne's horse, giving an illusion that horse and rider floated in air, detached from the ground. As he watched, King Payne gave a wave of his hand, and Bowlegs cantered into view.

Artillery cocked his rifle and loosened the pistols he had stuck in his waistband. He had expected another round from the Seminoles. Instead, the two chiefs, riding side by side, began to gallop, and as though hell's noisiest pits had opened, four hundred shouting Seminoles poured from the swamp behind the riders and rose from the grass, tearing the quiet day to tatters with screaming sound as they charged in wild confusion.

"Fall back farther!" Newnan yelled.

Artillery obeyed, slipping back from tree to tree as Indians poured in by the lakeside.

The bugle blew, and Newnan's fighters started on the run to meet them. Artillery emptied his rifle and dropped it, then drew his pistols as he ran. A screaming Indian jumped from behind a nearby pine and fired at him point-blank, but the brave's Spanish musket missed fire. Both of Doctor Zeke's pistols flashed at once. The Indian fell on his faulty gun. Another with raised tomahawk, who was rushing in on Artillery's left, went down.

Order fled. A brave in a dozen feathers held Gabriel Ferrer tight with one hand and raised a knife with his other. Blood gushed over the hunter as Artillery sank his tomahawk into the Indian's skull.

The war cries of the Indians changed. Around Artillery all firing ceased. He found himself on the edge of the pinewoods, clutching his bloody tomahawk. The great white horse that had carried King Payne was galloping back toward the swamp without a rider.

Not a Seminole was visible, except Bowlegs. His stocky, feather-

draped figure sat without moving, watching the riderless stallion. He was within easy range of Newnan's men, but nobody fired.

As though in a tribute to bravery gone, the American bugle blew.

The party took posts where they had been before, and Artillery felt ill at the sight of bloody Indian scalps hung at the belts of some uniformed soldiers. With Indians, scalping was a savage ritual; with soldiers, it was merely a hunt for another souvenir.

"They'll be back," said Hasse Micco, "back to avenge the death of Payne, a thousand strong."

"Cut trees!" Colonel Newnan ordered. "We may stand a chance if a fort is built."

Working with the knowledge that life depended on proper protection, the tired party, with bleeding hands and muscles wracked to torture, built a makeshift fort by the end of the afternoon.

Bowlegs charged from the cover of the swamp when the sun was nearly down. He had doubled his forces, and the Indians back of him came in waves, rolling in like a frenzied ocean mad with fury.

Lieutenant Broadnax passed the word to load with buckshot. It seemed fruitless to try to stop such a charge, yet clogged with their own dead underfoot, a hundred yards from the breastworks, the Seminoles turned and retreated. The marines seldom missed, and the twenty-five marksmen holding the front never lost a shot. Artillery had fired twenty times during the charge, and twenty times he had seen an Indian fall.

The sun went down and darkness came, and Bowlegs, insane with grief at his brother's death, led another charge. Artillery was shooting by instinct now, firing at flashes, pouring buckshot into screams coming out of the darkness. A marine fell dead, the top of his head blown half away by an Indian ball.

Ferrer moved closer to Artillery and whispered, "And how are *your* bowels now, *amigo*?"

Artillery's answer went unheard in the crash of the hunter's musket.

The Indians turned less than twenty paces away from the stacked-log wall.

Five times they charged before nine o'clock, and five times the buckshot held them.

In between the charges was work—hacking trees in the darkness, dragging them in, straining and lifting with arms and bodies that pled for rest. When morning came, the whole encampment was

encircled by a wall, but seven men, including the quartermaster sergeant and the surgeon, had deserted during the night of work, taking the best of the horses with them.

With daylight, Bowlegs attacked again, pouring on them from every side. Three men were wounded, and two of the remaining horses killed. The men who had cursed out the Colonel the night before for driving them into labor were some of the first who praised him now in the snugness of the little fortress.

One by one, the horses died. Stench and a plague of flies came on. Days became the same as nights, except in the nights Artillery fired at flashes instead of at endless screaming figures, and used buckshot instead of ball. The mud on his clothes grew drier with blood from a place where a splinter had hit him. Rations vanished. Gabriel Ferrer's stomach rumbled more loudly. Artillery pulled his belt up tighter and felt his insides crawl.

On one of the nights, facing near starvation, Lieutenant Reed and Artillery volunteered to forage. Six more men went with them, including Gabriel Ferrer. All night long they traveled the woods, circling ponds and seeking deer on tiny stretches of open prairie. But game had moved from the noisy battle, and the woods that were usually full proved bare. Twelve miles from the tiny fort, Ferrer shot a bull at dawn.

For another day under blistering sun, they dragged and hauled and pushed the heavy carcass. By the time the walls of the fort were in sight and others had come to help them, Artillery felt as King Payne had felt. He didn't care.

Yet the beef proved a change from eating horses.

Three times that night the persistent Bowlegs attacked again. The beef had vanished, the last of the horses been killed and eaten, and eight wounded men were suffering in patient agony when the Colonel fell ill, shaking with ague and burning with fever.

Five times Bowlegs attacked again. The eighth day broke with a murky sky, bringing the fiercest attack of all in the afternoon. It was nearly dark when the Indians finally retreated, carrying all of their dead away.

Colonel Newnan said, "We leave tonight. No help can possibly reach us here, and our food's all gone. I'd rather be slaughtered in the open. What do you men say?"

"You're in command, sir," said Captain Fort.

"Then we leave tonight," said Newnan. "God help us on our way."

When the darkness was full, eight wounded men were placed

on litters. The Colonel, with scarce the strength to stand, insisted on walking, leaning on an officer's arm. Hasse Micco slipped out and reconnoitered. Half an hour later, the little fort which had held so well was evacuated in silence, its white tents still standing ghostlike in the darkness.

By daylight, the party was hidden in the swamp which had sheltered it on the eve of the battle nine days before. Here the Colonel ordered a halt and took stock of his ragged crew. The strongest of the lot were scarcely able to lift the litters. Ten more men were missing, dropped out, overcome by exhaustion, or deserted during the night of retreat, never to be seen again.

Captain Humphreys approached the Colonel early in the morning, saluted, and said, "It's obvious, sir, that without wagons for transportation, carrying the wounded will delay us so, it will be the death of us all."

"And what do you propose, sir?" Newnan's eyes burned as he fought another chill.

"Frankly," said Captain Humphreys, "that the most able of us push on."

"Since I'm unable to walk without help, Captain," the Colonel told him, "I'm one of the wounded, too."

"My marines are volunteers, as are Captain Fort's infantry. It's our duty to get them back alive."

Captain Fort stepped up. "Speak for yourself, Captain Humphreys, and not for me and my men."

"You and the wounded will stand a better chance, sir," Humphreys persisted. "In force and traveling swiftly, we can reach Picolata and in five days have reinforcements back here to rescue you."

"Or what's left of them, picked clean by buzzards!" A corporal of marines stepped up. A filthy bandage covered a bloody spot on his arm. "I'm still on my feet, Captain, but you might class me as one of the wounded, too. The marines think it's safer to stay here with the Colonel and the wounded men. If you want to go ahead alone, sir, maybe you can get through."

"And suppose I order you on with Captain Humphreys?" Newnan demanded.

Lieutenant Broadnax said, "I'm afraid you might cause insubordination, sir. Captain Humphreys' plan is good military strategy, but this happens to be an expedition of volunteers. We're volunteering to stay here with the wounded and with you."

For the next eight hours, the fight was against mosquitoes, then,

slowed to a painful, dragging pace, the column pushed on at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Death seemed so near that caution was forgotten. The scouts were called in to help with spells on the litters. The country that Artillery loved had turned into a plumaged hell, where every tree was an enemy, and every bush was topped with bright-colored feathers. A mile dragged out in safety, two miles, and three.

Staggering along with Hasse Micco on the front of a litter which grew heavier at every step, Artillery finally spotted feathers in the branches of a tree. He fired his pistol without lowering the litter. An Indian fell, ripping down branches with him. The shot was answered by withering fire which poured in from each side of the trail. Ferrer went down, a bloody patch where his old and worn skunkskin hat should have been. Two other men fell.

A screeching brave in chief's array came charging down the front of the trail.

Hasse Micco said, "Chief Governor!"

Artillery fired with his rifle at slope. The chief fell flat, turned from a man into two long rows of motionless feathers waving along the sandy trail. Braves swarmed out from among the trees and carried him away.

The bugle blew new life into weary bodies, answering the Colonel's order to charge. The Indians vanished.

Nine more wounded were placed on litters and the column moved on. Once again, nights merged into days—no food but gophers and palmetto stocks, no horses, and all hopes gone. On the second night, they reached the edge of a little pond, and Artillery found food by shooting a twelve-foot gator.

The Colonel said, "Tomorrow I stay with the wounded in this hammock. We die if we move or die if we stay. It's my orders that the rest of you push on."

Artillery said, "I'm going ahead alone, sir. I can make Picolata tomorrow night. Hold the company together, and I'll have you help here early the following day."

"I can go," said Hasse Micco.

"No," said Artillery. "If the column should be forced to move or be attacked, it's necessary that you be here. Gabriel knew this country, but he's dead. You know most of the traps that Bowlegs may set. Try to push on if you possibly can to the two small ponds tomorrow, and set up breastworks there. I doubt if Bowlegs will make an attack on such a strong position."

"It's nice for you, Mr. Armes," said Captain Humphreys. "You

have proved your skill as a fighter, but how do you know you can make it alone to Picolata? You've left us full of useless hopes if you fail."

"I'm leaving all my weapons here, except the tomahawk I carry. I have something here I've never used."

Artillery reached in his pouch, took out a rolled-up kerchief, and slowly unwound it. Moonlight streamed down on the tired company and lighted the little lake beside them. Artillery tied a thong around his forehead and knotted it tight.

"In the name of God, what's that?" asked Colonel Newnan weakly.

"He wears the plume of Cheti Haiola," said Hasse Micco. "He speaks the truth, for I know what I see. There is something in him of red man and white. It is the red that will bring you back to safety. He could have worn that plume in battle and remained untouched while killing a hundred of Bowlegs' braves. Cheti Haiola is old and wise, and would take for a son only one who wears his plume in honor. Artillery Armes is my brother, Young Eagle. He speaks the truth. He can walk down any trail unharmed. The eyes of a thousand braves may watch his progress, but no red man living fires upon the plume of Cheti Haiola."

Artillery retraced the trail alone, yet he knew that others went with him, invisible shades that threaded the trees in silence, helpless against the skyward sweep of his aigrette plume because they were bound with some barbaric code of their own. He passed the two ponds which he hoped Colonel Newnan would reach in safety, recrossed the stream where the gator and turtles had sunned together in amity, but a boy made the journey and not a man—a boy unafraid, because his belief in the word and bond of a savage was one of the very few things impervious to the flames of time.

He swam the St. Johns River, and found McIntosh at the fort with Storm.

Mounted again, he set out with sixteen provision-laden horsemen in an hour. The country had lost its sinister air, and somehow the bushes and flowers seemed free of lurking feathers. He was traveling again toward a prairie where a peaceful sleep and perfect rest lay at the end of the journey, a spot where he might awake refreshed to see strange warriors grouped about a fire, paying respect to their chieftain's son, Hasse Micco. One of the warriors might lift him in his arms and carry him like a baby in the war canoe.

Ahead of him, he heard a cheer as Newnan and his seventy-five survivors caught sight of the rescue party. But it wasn't soldiers

cheering. The sound was the wild approval of red men living undisturbed in happy safety, rising in ranks that covered the square of an Indian village, shouting, "Ai—aye," at the sight of a new-found brother crowned for courage with Cheti Haiola's plume.

6

ARTILLERY WAKENED WITH a ray of sun slanting into his eyes. He followed the beam and saw that it came through a crack in the wall of thatched palmettoes, turned light brown from their original green.

Gradually, as he wakened more fully, pictures crept back of the ten days before. Steadily, he and Hasse Micco had traveled south, fording rippling streams and rushing rivers, shooting what game they could find to live, plunging deeper into country that was new to Artillery, a country he had heard of but scarcely believed, where forests of cypress and swamp ash grew so thick the horses could find no passage between the trees and were forced into a day's detour. Great lakes were skirted, with tops of bushes and blades of grass peeping above the surface, mysterious bodies of water, large enough to sail a schooner when the season was wet, only to become waterless tracts of prairie when the season was dry.

After six days, the province Artillery had known vanished, giving way to a grassy sea. Their horses were left with a friendly chief and replaced by a stout canoe. Three days of trackless, black-watered tunnels followed, where all the wild life of Florida seemed to have collected on the bushy banks. The journey ended when the canoe was grounded at a hidden hammock late the night before.

Not far from where Artillery lay was a larger unwalled shelter. Its thatched roof covered a fire of logs laid end to end in circular fashion like the spokes of a wheel. Suspended above the fire was a tremendous iron kettle, tended by a squaw. Smoke rose, spiraled about the blackened kettle, and struck the palmetto roof above, where it filtered through. Occasionally, a puff of wind stirred the surrounding trees, bearing the blue smoke downward and into the hut to make his eyes smart.

The Seminole woman tending the pot wore a shapeless filthy garment. On her back was a small snug sack, suspended by a broad strap which went across her forehead. She turned her back, and he

found himself stared at by the grave, dark eyes of an Indian baby, hidden except for its serious face, a tiny wisp of humanity, half-starved, which looked as though it might die that day. There was a noise of barking and snarling as a dozen emaciated curs gathered around the squaw at the fire, attracted by the smell of the stew. She stopped her stirring long enough to seize a bough and chase them away.

A few men gathered. They were old and dirty, clad in filthy shirts and diapers, like the Indians who had followed him in St. Augustine. They took their places silently. The squaw served stew, giving each man a gourd and a wooden spoon.

A shadow fell in front of Artillery's hut, and Cheti Haiola came in. Age rested on him heavily. His mouth was sunken, and the lines of too much sorrow for a single man to bear were etched into the crevices of his lightish skin. A fragment of an unwashed green cloth headdress covered his matted hair. Around the bottom, a few lone beads remained of what once had been a delicate design, but around his neck he wore a chain which held on his chest the crescent of shining silver, still bright and untarnished. Sacking was tied about his feet in lieu of moccasins. His withered legs were bare.

The old squaw served them. Artillery sipped of the *sofkee* and found it thin. The squaw brought in a lighted pipe when the meal was finished. Cheti Haiola took a puff and passed it to Artillery. He puffed in turn and passed it back.

"I'm Cheti Haiola of Ouithlocko," the old chief stated. "I'm called by the white men Rising Star, but my star is set. I have felt the cold of a hundred winters and the heat of a hundred summers. I have longed for rest and the joy of the chase with my son, Nethlehasse Micco. But rest would not come until I welcomed my son, Young Eagle, and the son of my son, Hasse Micco, once again."

"Your servant, sir," said Artillery.

"Nay," said Cheti Haiola, "—my son." He puffed at his pipe. "I have heard many things; the tale of a man who has fought against raiders with the heart of *Yahchilane*—the eagle—and whose bullets speed as *Hullalay*—the wind—to drive the Spanish from the province, and to kill *Iste Chattemashay*—many red men—teaching them the wisdom never to kill again. I have heard of the death that has touched you and the fortune gone to free a single woman from chains, though her skin was nearly dark as mine. I have heard that Young Eagle rides alone."

He stopped and sat puffing, and Artillery stared at the sunlit

square. An old man staggered out from the trees, gulped the last of a gourd of taffi, and sank down to sleep by the side of the fire. A cur came up and smelled him, then moved away.

"You watch and you wonder," said Cheti Haiola, "why the *sofkee* is thin when I live in a country of plentiful game. I rule a village of women, not hunters. I spoke, but the young did not listen, nor did they listen to the words of King Payne, but forced him to lead them. So he rode to his death, and now our nation is leaderless and broken. We have seen the flag of America and the flag of the new Republic for which you fought. Our cattle are gone and our crops and our slaves. Suns will rise and moons will set, and my brothers will move as I have moved, vainly seeking a place of safety where my children can gather and grow their cattle again. There will be no place until we find another leader with the spirit of King Payne."

"He was very brave," said Artillery.

"Without wisdom, bravery becomes a fault." Cheti Haiola knocked out his pipe. "The white man Jefferson had both. The General Mathews whom you followed had only one. The man who rules America now has half of each. His people fight with England. His soldiers and his ships have occupied this country, supporting rebels. Without his help, these rebels would not have succeeded. Without their success, my people would not be fighting, urged on by pride and the promises of Spain."

"Then you think I was wrong," said Artillery. "I have helped these rebels, Cheti Haiola."

"Were you helping them when you were happy?"

"No, I guess I wasn't." Artillery thought a moment. "I was offered work after Dan was caught. Then Don Jose de Reduro told me I was working for a traitor, John Houston McIntosh, and I began to worry. After that, I started to raise a family and forgot about it. Then my family died. The next thing I knew I was knee-deep in it again. I thought this would help you and your people, Cheti Haiola, give you the protection of the United States, and deliver you from the weakness of Spain."

"You worked for no traitor," said Cheti Haiola. "John Houston McIntosh is an American, working in turn for his country. Like his cousin, John McIntosh, who fights now as a general against the British in Georgia, he has always been loyal to his country, the United States, and never to Spain." Cheti Haiola reached out with his almost transparent blue-veined hand and fingered the ripped and ragged coat Artillery wore. "Nor did you help them for profit, my son, Young Eagle."

"Then why did I help?" Artillery asked. "I must have been an awful fool."

"A fool is neither wise nor brave," said Cheti Haiola. "You are always brave and most times wise, for your youth partook of wisdom from the wisest man I ever knew. I know what I see. Few men living and none who are young have the wisdom and courage to search the heart of a country; you, less than most, for, like Dan McKetch, you had none of your own to cling to—neither the United States nor Spain. Yet I know still more. Wisdom is seldom present in the mind of a man, either old or young, when that man's heart is filled with pain."

Artillery said, "I can't go on, Cheti Haiola. I'm lonely. There's nothing left. I thought I might live with you in your village, but your village is gone. Hasse Micco said Dauna was waiting. That's why I came here. I'm sick of flags and cannon and killing. I'm sick of dreams that disappear and memories that plague me. She's the only thing left I really love. With her and our children, I'd have the courage to work and fight and build a home. I'm sick of change."

"Then never return to anything you've known before," said Cheti Haiola. "A wise chief moves always north or south or east or west, and never retraces a battered trail. Move forward, and all things you see are always fresh and new, and therefore good until proven bad. There is always change when the man in search of happiness he cannot find turns his back in fear and seeks the joys of his youth again."

"Has Dauna changed?" Artillery asked. "I mistreated her and she left me—the first real love I ever had."

"Do you love her now," asked Cheti Haiola, "or are you walking back to the scenes of your youth?"

"I love her," said Artillery, "with all my body, heart, and brain.

"She's a Maroon and a slave," said Cheti Haiola. "Would you have her bear you children to be raided for slaves, and her with them, as Hasse Micco and his mother were taken? You've seen her on the slave block and beaten her body because she called you master. I know what I know. She was taken once. Can you stand the thought that she and her children will be classed by the Georgia planters as cattle; that some day other men may beat her and bed her, and your children as well; that she'll have to call them master and bend to their will?"

"I want her for my wife," said Artillery. "I'm not marrying her blood or her race or her color. I'll join your people and build a home so deep in the wilderness no one will find us. We'll push on

forward forever, and never turn back. She's not a slave, for I freed her. She will always be free."

"Sometimes the whites are slaves themselves," said Cheti Haiola, and shifted himself on his tired old legs. "I know of two hundred, white as you, who died beneath the planter's lash in slavery. For forty summers, I have saved the tale for you, my son Young Eagle. Since you love this girl and not her skin, it's well you listen.

"For thirty years the flag of England flew above this province, and during that time our tribes were very strong." He clapped his hands and the squaw brought in another pipe. For a long time he smoked, drawing his feeble body erect, as though finding strength in the pictures that were passing in review. "Our slaves were only slaves in name, for they lived quite free, as they live today, in villages of their own, sharing with us their crops and cattle for the protection we can give them. Oftentimes, they marry with us, since we hold no hatred of the color of their skin.

"Ten winters before the flag of America was born in battle, a Scotchman, calling himself Dr. Andrew Turnbull, settled many leagues from here near the sea below St. Augustine."

"I know of that," Artillery said. "I've met the Minorcans and talked to many of them while I was living in St. Augustine. Turnbull called his colony New Smyrna."

"It is well you know," said Cheti Haiola, "for it is in that colony of New Smyrna that my story must begin. Its settlers flooded there in strength, protected by a British sloop of war. They spoke many tongues—"

"English, Italian, Greek, and Spanish," Artillery put in. "The *lingua franca,* combining them all, is still spoken in St. Augustine today, Cheti Haiola."

"You have great knowledge of many things," the old chief said, "but I who am older have more. They settled on land so vast and extended that the swiftest of runners could have seen but part if he ran for the length of a moon. There creeks were dug and houses were built, and land was cleared, and the whites who had come from across the sea planted those lands in indigo. It is a crop which cannot be eaten but, like tobacco, must be turned into gold. Again, like tobacco, these white men found it takes much labor to grow. You have grown tobacco."

"Yes," said Artillery, "I know."

"Among those who settled," the chief went on, "was a white man, Georges Alessios, who had a wife called Sparta. Alessios found in this settlement that Dr. Andrew Turnbull had more power

than a cruel king, and still more lust for gold. From break of dawn until dark of night, these settlers worked. British soldiers guarded them. Children were sent to till the fields to make the indigo grow. Some tried to escape, but the lash on flesh and sometimes death from the soldiers' guns was the fate of those who wished to go.

"So it was with Alessios. He died, leaving in the arms of Sparta a baby girl, Athena, born to them three summers before. I found them wandering in the woods during a violent night of storm—this mother, Sparta, with her child, Athena. She held by the hand a little boy, Peter Galanthea, a playmate of her baby daughter and scarcely older. His father and mother had died beneath the guns of Turnbull's soldiers while seeking to leave this indigo plantation three days before."

The old chief's pipe had expired as he talked. He put it down beside him. "I have seen many things," he muttered softly. "I know what I know. These children were children of olive skin. They were all born free, yet Sparta sought freedom among my slaves and told me that black blood flowed in her veins and in the veins of the children, for only in a village of slavery, having fled from the white man, could she really be free. I placed her in the village of blacks, who left her and the children in peace to till their garden in happiness. She died, and there I watched the children grow and marry —Peter and Athena Galanthea."

"Those names are Greek," said Artillery.

Cheti Haiola slowly turned his head to stare. "You speak many tongues, and I a few. You are called two names: Artillery Armes by men, and the name Young Eagle by me, yet if I pronounced the word *Yahchilane,* I mean the same. Let it be spoken in Greek or Spanish or French or English, or *lingua franca,* it is still of you I speak— Young Eagle, my son. I tell you this because white men think not of things which live, but of the sounds which fall from another white man's tongue. I say to you 'slave,' and you think of the sound, and feel you may own the one I speak of, not stopping to find if the one I speak of is freer than you.

"It is equally thus when I utter the sounds 'Maroon' or 'red man' —you have pictured without searching a person blacker in color or redder in skin and inferior in station of life to you.

"A child was born to Peter and Athena Galanthea," the chief went on. "She was born in a village where people were darker in color, but freer than the white men her mother's mother had fled from. These people, dark in color, fished and hunted when they

willed, toiled in the fields when it pleased them, slept when they wished, ate of that which their labors produced, built what they needed when not tired, loved those who loved them, producing children, sang and danced in the moonlight, and drowsed without fear in the noonday sun. The white men call them runaway slaves. The red men call them brothers and sisters. Among their numbers, the girl-child born in love to Peter and Athena, because of her shade, was called Dauna—the Light One."

"Does she know this?" asked Artillery. "Has anyone ever told her, Cheti Haiola, that she's white and free, the daughter of Greeks who came from beyond the ocean?"

"No one has told her," said Cheti Haiola. "It is a secret which until now has belonged to me."

"Why didn't you tell her? Or why didn't her mother, Athena, tell her? Or her father, Peter?"

"It was the wish of Sparta," said Cheti Haiola, "a woman whose back bore the marks of the lash from the indigo fields. She knew the falseness of the sounds which are made by a white man's tongue. She wanted Athena and Peter to believe they were slaves and partly black, and their children, too. Her husband, Georges, and Peter's father and mother had died beneath the white man's freedom working for gold. Until Sparta fled, changing her color and joining the blacks in slavery, she knew she had never been free."

"But Dauna's mother worked as a slave for John McIntosh at Bellevue. Dauna was a slave at John Houston McIntosh's at Fort George," Artillery protested. "That was where she was captured by the raiders."

Cheti Haiola said, "It was raiders, Young Eagle, who killed Dauna's father, Peter, and stole Athena and Dauna from my village. They found refuge and happiness with the McIntoshes. Dauna would have returned to Fort George except for fear of meeting you there, and that the McIntosh child she was teaching died five summers ago, struck down by fever. Do you love her more because she's white?"

"I love her because she's Dauna," said Artillery.

"And she has waited because you're you," said Cheti Haiola, "not because you're black or white, or because men's tongues pronounce the name Artillery Armes, Young Eagle, or *Yahchilane*. I know what I know, and you know what I have told you. I know still more—since you love her not for race or color, that you have the strength against red men or white to keep her forever free. Go now

and claim her, and turn no more to days that are past. Such things must be left for men who are old, like me."

Artillery went out and crossed the square. His life had been mapped by running streams. He found her waiting by this one, as he knew he would find her, sitting with her knees drawn up, her back against a tree.

In the midst of decay and the Indian squalor, her dress was white, and a flower shone red against her hair. Was it yesterday, or the year before, or all eternity? It never could matter, for his heart lighted up with the same great promise of fulfillment and burned with the same unappeasable flame, only stronger now since it burned in a man instead of a boy.

"Hello, master." There were tears in back of her mocking grin. "Your clothes need pressing."

"Damn you!" he said. "If you call me that—"

"You could have me flogged," she suggested softly. "It's better than being without you."

She held up her hands, and he helped her rise, then touched her gently—her hair, her eyes, her nose, and her throat—for fear she might vanish as everything had vanished. She was very real when he held her close, so real that she wiped out everything but joy.

BOOK SEVEN

1813

★

THE BABY

★

CHAPTER 1

THE black smudge of swampland bordering the circular clearing extended southward following a stream, which some miles on widened to the dignity of calling itself a river. That, in turn, flowed into the great St. Johns, which, changing its course from north to east at the Cowford, dumped its waters twenty miles eastward grandiloquently into the Atlantic.

In October 1812, about the time that Colonel Newnan was breaking the back of the Seminole nation through his battle with Bowlegs and King Payne, Secretary of State Monroe relieved Governor Mitchell of Georgia from his command of the American troops in Florida, and sent Major General Thomas Pinckney to take charge of the whole border situation.

On April 27, 1813, Lieutenant Colonel T. A. Smith abandoned Camp New Hope on the St. Johns River early in the morning after setting all the buildings on fire. On the sixth of May, after a conference with Major General Pinckney, Governor Kindelan arrived at Fernandina with a force of Spanish regulars for a garrison. The flag of Spain went up again as the Stars and Stripes came down.

Over the rest of East Florida, as American troops were withdrawn into Georgia, flew the white and blue flag of the baby East Florida Republic.

Don Luis de Onis, the Spanish minister at Washington, had proclaimed an act of amnesty for the Patriots, left on their own by the United States' withdrawal. The president of the little republic, John Houston McIntosh, removed the seat of government to Fort George Plantation, and there set up a temporary White House in his home.

The kindly Hulbert, returned from Washington to assist in McIntosh's government, had greeted Dauna and the news of Artillery's marriage to her with friendliness.

"Our sorrows are shared," he told Artillery. "I'm older than you, yet I have found as you have that no man can be happy alone. The land on the St. Johns River is yours, my son, if you care to try raising silkworms again."

"I could never go back," Artillery told him.

McIntosh said, "Years ago, Daniel, I told him he might call my home his own. Now there's nothing left but the big house here, and soon that will belong to Zephaniah Kingsley, I fear, and my acres with it. I'm indebted to him deeply for a loan."

"I have a grant near the old King's Road," said Hulbert. "Part is cleared, and there's water near, and good grazing for cattle. It's yours, Artillery, to settle there."

"I have no money, sir."

"Nor has any man when he starts anew," said Hulbert, "but I'll say you have earned something more valuable—friends. McIntosh and I thought you would not want to return to the river. He's putting in fifty head of cattle for what he owes you through the years."

"You owe me nothing, Mr. McIntosh—neither Mr. Hulbert nor you."

"Then call the cattle a gift," said McIntosh, "—a gift to Dauna, instead of you. A gift to one who loved and taught my daughter."

"You can pay what you want for the land, and when you want to," said Hulbert, "or call it a gift to the only man my daughter loved, and whom I love as a son."

"I'll pay for it somehow," Artillery said, "and the cattle too. There are others who will help me—Dick Benedict and Marjorie; Hasse Micco and Patchechole, his wife. She's as gentle as her name, which means a dove."

"No matter if you pay or not," said Hulbert. "The land is yours when I die, or your children's."

So, close to Christmas, Artillery's twenty-fifth birthday in 1812, the three young couples had entered the clearing, and building had begun.

Now, in August 1813, Artillery sat on the steps of his porch and gazed across the clearing. The three houses were built exactly alike, four rooms each with a covered porch. A fourth building, used as a common storehouse, barn, and stable, completed the west side of a square around a huge live oak with a trunk so large that two tall men could scarcely have encircled it with extended arms.

The live oak gave shade, but the ground on which the houses stood was sandy and dry, and spotted with palmettoes. There was no visible sign that anything living had ever set foot in the clearing before, yet Artillery, Dick and Hasse Micco had known on sight that the live oak centered a spot where years before some settler had made a home.

The houses were strategically placed so that each one covered approach to the other and all three covered the barn. Heavy shutters with diamond ports could be closed in an instant, barricading every door and window.

The heat of the summer had brought out sap on all the houses so that the boards no longer looked new. In back of Dick's house the same summer heat had matured and ripened a sizable field of corn. Behind Artillery's house, across the square from the barn, was a garden where tomatoes, beans, onions, and potatoes had grown in ample plenty since the spring.

A pig sty, built high on posts for safety from marauding animals, contained eight grunting, fattening hogs, and occupied a place of honor beside the barn.

It was very quiet in the clearing and very warm. Artillery could hear the thud of Dick's hoe in the garden and the clank of a pot as Marjorie prepared the supper, aided by a song. In back of Hasse Micco's house, Patchechole was busy with a large wooden mortar and pestle, in Indian fashion bruising corn.

The sun began to lower over the top of the swamp. Artillery stood and went inside. Dauna lay on a clean white sheet on a heavy oak bed. A slight breeze played through the house from back to front. The room was not too unpleasantly hot, although the curtain was partly drawn. At the sight of him, she smiled, and he bent down and kissed her.

"Tired waiting?"

"Not if you're here."

"I'll always be here," he told her. "Hasse Micco rode to Point Peter to get the American army surgeon. He promised to come, you know, when we needed him. I don't know why they're taking so long."

"There's plenty of time," Dauna told him. "I've seen a hundred babies born, and I won't be worried even if he doesn't get here. Marjorie and Patchechole together are as good as any doctor."

Artillery said, "It still seems long." He placed a hand on her forehead. It was cool to his touch, and he smoothed back her hair, then took a dipperful of water from a bucket hanging on a hook and

let her drink, raising her with an arm beneath her shoulders. "We'll need more water, Dauna."

She laughed. "Are you having this baby, or am I, Mr. Armes?"

"It's almost the same thing," Artillery told her.

"Well, get more water," said Dauna, "but don't get lost in the swamp. It's a habit of yours—remember? And when you get the water, tell Marjorie to feed you supper and fill you with rum and keep you there until you hear me hoot like an owl."

"I can't help being worried," he told her.

"Of course you can't." She held up her arms and pulled him down tight and close to kiss him. "You remember the only girl who ever threw you at wrestling?" she whispered.

"You're a baggage," he told her.

"I've been almost flogged into being a lady, but there's one thing you forget, Mr. Armes. The Indians not only called me Dauna Saputhatke—the Light One; there were also times they called me Dauna the Strong."

He took a yoke for his shoulders from the kitchen, found two empty buckets, and hooked them on. With his rifle tucked beneath his arm, he took the path past the pigsty and the barn. The swamp was a wall of spindly cypress, thatched with tangled vines. He followed the path cut through it to the edge of the creek where he set the buckets down.

It was dark in the swamp, and the day was nearly gone. Swarms of mosquitoes resented his invasion, but mosquitoes had been a part of his life, and he scarcely paused to brush them away. Standing unmoving, he watched a flock of wild turkey circle in to settle effortlessly on the branches of a nearby cypress tree.

Artillery cut down on his breathing and stayed immobile as the nearby tree. The gobbler's long neck snaked out while the beady eyes made a cautious survey. Artillery snap-shot. The twenty-pound gobbler crashed to earth, its head smashed off with a single ball. The frightened hens took off majestically.

It took some time to find the gobbler, who had fluttered off in his death throes.

Artillery filled his buckets, tucked the turkey beneath his arm, and retraced his trail. He got out just in time, for already with dusk the contours of the swamp had changed. Fifteen minutes longer, and he might have been trapped in its sticky embrace until day.

Dauna was standing on the porch, Marjorie and Dick beside her. "I heard the shot."

"Food for the doctor and Hasse Micco." He held up the turkey.

Dauna steadied herself against Marjorie's arm. "You were gone so long, I was worried."

He dropped the bird, came up the steps, and held her tight before he helped her back to the bedroom. There he bathed her forehead gently, and asked, "What happened to the wrestler whom the Indians called 'Dauna the Strong?'"

He sat on the bed and held her hand as night closed in. Candles glowed out from the Benedicts' window, telling him supper was waiting. He looked at Dauna, found her asleep, then struck a flint, and left a candle burning.

As he started out to his supper, Patchechole stopped him at the door. Before she could speak, the lights were snuffed in the Benedicts' house.

"*Halwuk,*" she whispered, "*iste Chattemaschay,*" and lapsing into her broken English, "Many red men—hear shot in swamp—they come to see—now all around."

"Close the shutters, Patchechole," Artillery told her softly.

It never ended. He remembered the morning he stepped outside into Hulbert's grove and shook his fist at the rising sun.

Dick came in with Marjorie, each of them carrying two muskets and sacks of powder and ball. A big bar dropped across the door.

Dick whispered, "Remember the night on the river?"

"Yes," said Artillery, "I remember. We were weak beneath the flag of Spain. The United States was weaker. But this god-damned republic we've set up here is the weakest of them all! You take the front and watch the clearing. Let Marjorie and Patchechole load. Did you touch off the fire under the oak?"

Dick asked, "What do you think we've kept it ready for? It will light the clearing for an hour. Maybe by that time they'll change their mind."

"You should have stayed in your own house," Artillery said. "With firing from two places, they might get an idea that we're stronger than we are."

Marjorie said, "Patchechole and I are shooting, not loading."

Dauna spoke from the door of the room, looming there whitely. "You'll learn sometime, Mr. Armes, that women are much stronger than you think they are."

"Get back on the bed!" he told her.

She walked into the room and picked up a musket. "We're using the bed. Marjorie and I can fire from behind it. There's no better fortress than feathers for stopping a musket ball."

"Dauna—"

"I know, Mr. Armes." Her voice was gentle. "I'm not going to lose. It's you and the baby I'm fighting for. Hurry now and tilt the mattress against the wall."

Outside, the fat chips took hold and touched the logs. Sap crackled, popped, and sputtered. Suddenly, the flames shot high. Shadows flickered and the clearing became a circular cathedral with all the darkness gone.

Artillery went to the port at the back. The light had spread, and beyond the garden he could see another fire—one that Hasse Micco had lit to burn the woods and bring up grass for the cattle. It rippled gently along the ground to disappear southward among the pines behind the field of corn.

Hideous and demonic in paint and feathers, figures broke from the trees, yelling and screaming. Artillery held his fire, then coolly picked out the nearest one and shot him. The Indian fell, his arms sprawled wide. Artillery changed his rifle for a fowling-piece. Buckshot caused another one to fall.

It didn't seem to matter, for all his life had focused now, and God and poetry and passion within him had turned to ice. Man refused to love others and fought for flags, and flags were false, saving neither men nor mothers nor unborn children. Only love could save him now and Dauna and her baby, for love was the sting of Doctor Zeke's cane and the accuracy of the old man's pistols. Love was a knife in Hasse Micco's hand, red from avenging his father. Love was nothing but dealing death to bring on peace forever.

He shot without missing, loading faster than ever man had loaded, deadlier than *vomito negro,* the killer, for a hatred of quitting before he was through and a hatred of being swept clean again had stamped the lust of killing into his brain.

They came in waves as Bowlegs had charged. The clearing grew lighter until every plant in the garden showed bright. Artillery fired faster, knowing that Hasse Micco's house had joined the endless flame.

A field piece roared from the north of the clearing, its langrage ripping a Seminole to pieces as he raised his gun to fire. Muskets flashed from among the pines. Horsemen rode from out of the trees, hacking at the fleeing braves.

In the other room, he heard Dauna moaning, and ran in to her.

"It's the baby, Mr. Armes," she whispered. "He's coming."

Not until he heard her whisper did he realize that the night and the clearing were still as death again.

Feet clumped on the porch. The door was opened, and men stormed in—McIntosh, Quentin, the doctor, black George Jacobo, everyone he could call a friend.

The surgeon looked at Dauna sitting on the floor, her back against the mattress, a musket resting across her swollen belly.

"God's mercy!" he said, and lifted her gently to lead her into the other room. He turned on Artillery. "Get out! Go away! Saddle your horse and ride, man! Drink you some rum, and leave my sight! The next few hours I need women here, not men."

He left the doctor and went outside with Quentin and McIntosh. Black figures were wasting water on what was left of Hasse Micco's house, but Artillery knew it would have to be built again. A man on horseback sat watching, holding straight against his saddle the republic's standard of white and blue.

McIntosh said, "We defeated the Spanish in a battle along the St. Marys this afternoon. These Indians who attacked you were helping them. We were on our way back to Fort George when we heard the firing."

"Praise God!" added Quentin. "The Spanish will have to treat with Mr. McIntosh now, for the last of their strength, such as it was, was broken today. I hope the strength of the Indians is broken, too."

"Will Dauna be all right?" Artillery had heard nothing. "She was moaning."

"Damn it, man," said McIntosh, "it's the way of women having a child! I've some of that whisky you like so well in my saddlebags. We'll go to Benedict's house and sample it. 'Twill help to see you through."

"I can't," said Artillery. "Something's seized me tonight as it seized me when Bethany's children were born. You'll excuse me if I wait alone, and you'll understand that my heart's in the thanks I'm offering to all of you."

He crossed the clearing and saddled Storm. The Indians would be far away and the woods all safe until morning. He took an old trail at the south of the clearing and let Storm walk with the reins fallen idle.

Far in the distance, he heard the hoot of an owl, and after a while another one answered. The fleeing Seminoles were gathering together in flight. He grinned in the darkness. They could imitate the call of every bird except the owl. Doctor Zeke and Dan had told him that. They got every note except the final one.

He rode on slowly until Storm stopped walking at an object

covered with bushes. Artillery dismounted and flashed his lighter. The blue flame flickered dimly on blackened ground which the graziers' fires had covered. He held the light closer and stared for a while at a rusted cannon over which the covering bushes grew.

He swung back on Storm and retraced the trail. Strange he had never thought why the circular clearing was so familiar. He was only a league from the old plantation fortress, reclaimed by palmettoes now. One clearing was much like another, and all plantations were just the same once they were burned and gone.

The woods were full of healing magic, and just for a second, other horsemen out of the past seemed to be riding with him. He stopped at the edge of the clearing and waited. The fire under the oak had died, and Hasse Micco's house was nothing but embers. Smoke struck sharp in his eyes and nostrils. To the eastward, in back of the garden, the grazing fires lighted by Hasse Micco still burned.

The light from the dying fire beneath the oak fell red against Artillery's chest. Something glittered, and caught by the gleam, his eyes moved down. He had forgotten the old coat made by Amy. It had stayed for years at McIntosh's and then moved with the rest of his things from the house to the clearing. In the excitement he had grabbed it from a peg on the wall and put it on. The six silver buttons were tarnished.

He listened, and across the clearing he heard an infant squall. He dismounted quickly and tethered Storm, then tiptoed around to in back of his house and stood there staring in the window, not daring to enter. The doctor was washing a crying red mite and puffing with pleasure on a twisted snaky cigar.

The breeze blew stronger. Smoke moved in and capped the clearing. Marjorie stirred inside the window and he heard her say, "It's a boy."

Moved by a feeling too deep to fathom, he dropped to his knees. The years rolled back to other settlers who had cleared and planted and built and fought and won and loved and left behind some spirit and faith that the flames of time could never entirely destroy.

The prayer he uttered was somehow familiar, for it came from the heart of every race in every land which had only one fear—that their line might die and leave nothing behind to make existence better.

"Take me if it be Thy will, Oh Lord, but spare my boy."

THE END

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